
FOUNDATIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

SECOND EDITION



Foundations of Academic Success: Second Edition

FOUNDATIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS: SECOND EDITION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

At James Cook University we acknowledge with respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples, educators and innovators of this country. We acknowledge that Country was never ceded, and value the accumulation of knowledge and traditions that reflect the wisdom of ancestral lines going back some 60,000 years, and recognise the significance of this in the ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are custodians of Country. As a University, we will continue to learn ways to care for and be responsible for Country, and we will collectively seek to build a future that is based on truth-telling, mutual understanding, hope, empowerment, and self-determination.



Kassandra Savage (JCU Alumni), 'Coming Together and Respecting Difference', acrylic on canvas, 2014, 90cm x 90cm. © Kassandra Savage, reproduced with permission of the artist.

ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

We believe that education should be available to everyone, which means supporting the creation of free, open, and accessible educational resources. We are actively committed to increasing the accessibility and usability of the open texts and resources we produce.

Accessibility Features of the Web Version of this Resource

The web version of this resource has been designed with accessibility in mind and incorporates the following features:

- Designed to consider the needs of people who use screen reading technology.
 - All content can be navigated using a keyboard.
 - Links, headings, and tables are formatted to work with screen readers.
 - Images have alt tags.
- Information is not conveyed by colour alone.

Other File Formats Available

In addition to the web version, this book is available in several file formats, including PDF, EPUB (for ereaders), and various editable files. Choose from the selection of available file types from the ‘Download this book’ dropdown menu. This option appears below the book cover image on the eBook’s landing page.

Third-Party Content

In some cases, our open texts include third-party content. In these cases, it may not be possible to ensure the accessibility of this content.

Accessibility Assessment

Below is a short accessibility assessment of key areas that have been assessed during the production process of this open text. The checklist has been drawn from the BCcampus Open Education Accessibility Toolkit.

While a checklist such as this is just one part of a holistic approach to accessibility, it is one way to begin our work on embedding good accessibility practices in the books we support.

We hope that by being transparent on our current books, we can begin the process of making sure accessibility is top of mind for all authors, adopters, students and contributors of all kinds on all our open-text projects. As such, we welcome any feedback from students, instructors or others who encounter the book and identify an issue that needs resolving.

Accessibility Checklist

Category	Item	Status
Organising Content	Content is organised under headings and subheadings	Yes
Organising Content	Headings and subheadings are used sequentially (e.g. Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.)	Yes
Images	Images that convey information include Alternative Text (alt-text) descriptions of the image's content or function	Yes
Images	Graphs, charts, and maps also include contextual or supporting details in the text surrounding the image	Yes
Images	Images, diagrams, or charts do not rely only on colour to convey important information	Yes
Images	Purely decorative images contain empty alternative text descriptions. (Descriptive text is unnecessary if the image doesn't convey contextual content information)	Yes
Tables	Tables include column headers and row headers where appropriate	Yes
Tables	Tables include a title or caption	Yes
Tables	Tables do not have merged or split cells	Yes
Tables	Tables have adequate cell padding	Yes
Weblinks	The web link is meaningful in context, and does not use generic text such as "click here" or "read more"	Yes
Weblinks	Externals web links open in a new tab. Internal web links do not open in a new tab.	Yes
Weblinks	If a link will open or download a file (like a PDF or Excel file), a textual reference is included in the link information (e.g. '[PDF]')	Yes
Embedded Multimedia	A transcript has been made available for a multimedia resource that includes audio narration or instruction	Yes
Embedded Multimedia	Captions of all speech content and relevant non-speech content are included in the multimedia resource that includes audio synchronised with a video presentation	Yes
Embedded Multimedia	Audio descriptions of contextual visuals (graphs, charts, etc.) are included in the multimedia resource	No
Formulas	Formulas have been created using MathML	–
Formulas	Formulas are images with alternative text descriptions if MathML is not an option	–
Font Size	Font size is 12 points or higher for body text	Yes
Font Size	Font size is 9 points for footnotes or endnotes	–
Font Size	Font size can be zoomed to 200%	Yes

AccessibilityImprovements

While we strive to ensure this resource is as accessible and usable as possible, we might not always get it right. We are always looking for ways to make our resources more accessible. If you have problems accessing this resource, please contact the James Cook University Open Education team to let us know so we can fix the issue.

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PREFACE

This book owes its origins to the open textbook *College Success*, written by Amy Baldwin. Baldwin's text aims to assist students' transition into tertiary study.

College Success was then adapted by a team of academic and support staff at the University of Southern Queensland into *Academic Success*, which updated the book to provide an Australian perspective on the university experience, with content especially re-worked for Australian students.

This book in turn was the inspiration for the JCU publication ***Foundations of Academic Success***, which is now in its ***Second Edition*** (the book you are currently reading), which was adapted to provide the support needed for James Cook University students entering bridging courses to prepare for studying at a degree level.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to university. Studying at a university level is a unique experience that requires you to learn and use skills that you may not have needed before. *Foundations of Academic Success: Second Edition* is a handbook of core skills designed to help you become a university student and empower you, whatever you are studying. Spending time learning and practising these skills will produce benefits that flow across all subjects throughout your years at university. Like any activity, being a university student takes a bit of work and practice, but you can master the skills required to succeed so that you can not only “survive” the university experience, but do well and enjoy yourself while you’re here.

Foundations of Academic Success: Second Edition is divided into four parts reflecting different aspects of the tertiary experience you will encounter.

Part A: Successful Beginnings addresses what it is like to be a new student at university. It begins with discussing the advantages of earning a tertiary education. It then details the experiences of adjusting to university life and the benefits of connecting with the people who can support you through this time.

Part B: Successful Foundations introduces basic skills in English language, and techniques for accessing and working with information in your subject area. It will also explain the importance of academic integrity and acknowledging your sources of information. These chapters are valuable particularly if you’re feeling unprepared for university or anxious about returning to study after years at home or in the workforce. They can build your confidence and prepare you for the new learning ahead. It is also a good place to check if there are any gaps in your understanding of the basic concepts you will rely on throughout your studies.

Part C: Successful Study Skills presents the everyday, core skills that successful students use while at university. These are methods applied by generations of students to manage time, set goals and beat procrastination. This discussion is followed by wealth of practical tips and tricks on reading efficiently, taking effective notes, organising a study space, and exploring ways to think critically, analytically and creatively about what you are learning.

Part D: Successful Assessment discusses the challenges of tertiary assessments. These chapters step you through the processes of writing assignments, constructing presentations, and preparing for exams. These are the pointers that can help you convert your hard work into strong grades that will ultimately earn your degree.

Chapters throughout the book conclude with a summary of key points. You can use these as a quick

reminder of what you have learnt. Be on the lookout for student stories throughout the chapters. These are short quotes from past and current students from diverse backgrounds, reflecting on their personal experiences at university.

Remember, as a university student you have a lot of options for support. The Student Centre, Learning Centre, Student Equity and Wellbeing, the Library and many other support services are here to help you make the most of your time at university, so while this book will help get you started, you always have someone you can turn to for help to you keep going.

PART A: SUCCESSFUL BEGINNINGS



Successful Beginnings

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TRANSITION TO UNI

Meghan Boland and Tony Hewitt



Figure 1. Who are you and why have you decided to go to university? Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

University study involves an educational transformation that can positively change a student's future prospects and quality of life. However, in order to undergo any transformation, you must experience a period of adjustment and transition. Commencing university is one of those major transition periods in your life that can be exciting as well as challenging, so it is normal to experience some emotional ups and downs in your first study period.

"A lot of people resist transition and therefore never allow themselves to enjoy who they

are. Embrace the change, no matter when it is; once you do, you can learn about the new world you're in and take advantage of it."

– Nikki Giovanni

Highs and Lows of University Life

Commencing university is an exciting time and students commonly feel happy and enthusiastic about their decision to study a chosen field. Your first study period at university will be a stimulating experience, but it is also a busy time as you learn about the university environment, academic expectations, learning technologies, where to go for help, as well as your course content.

These new and exciting challenges can cause students to feel anxious and unsure at various times, particularly around assessment periods. You may experience a wide range of feelings and moods and feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster in your first study period at university. Many students incorrectly believe that everyone is coping except for them, however, in reality everyone is riding the same ups and downs and you are not alone. So, remember to talk to your fellow classmates about how you are feeling (the good, the bad, and the ugly) as they will be having similar experiences and you can work through those challenging periods together.

Emotional highs and lows for a new student in their first teaching period - an example (based on a 13-week study period)

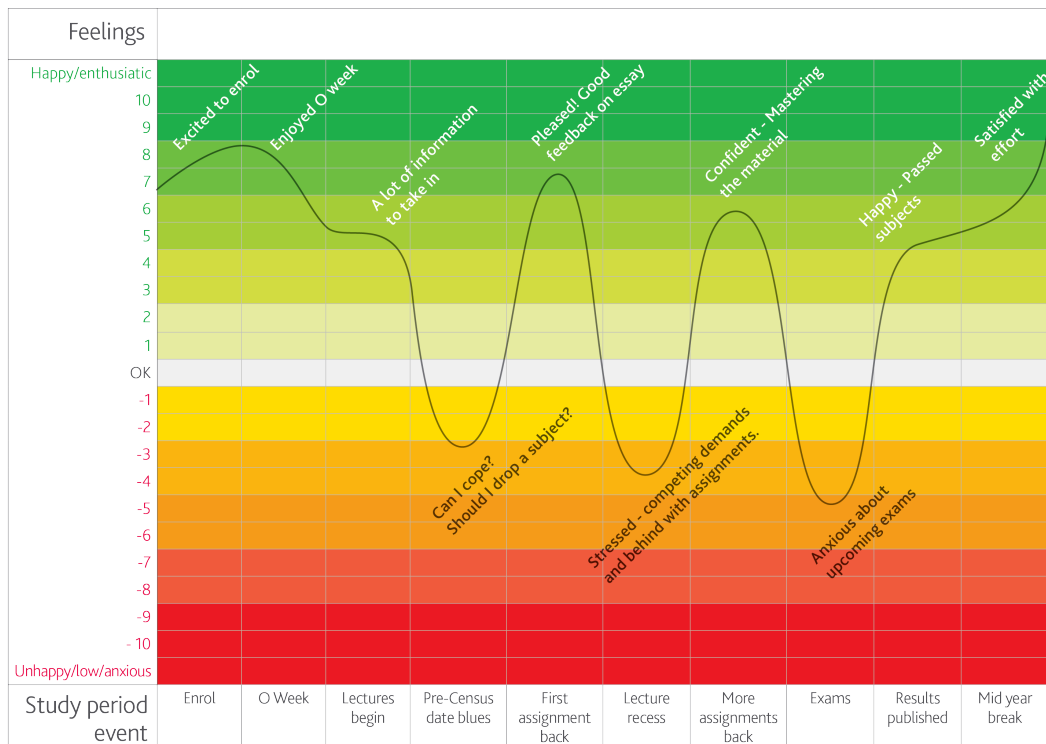


Figure 2. Emotional highs and lows. From Get Ready 4 Uni. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Differences between High School and University

For most new university students, their last education experience was in secondary school, so it is important to understand what the differences will be in a higher education setting. University is an adult learning environment, which means there is a strong emphasis on students becoming independent learners and managing their own study responsibilities, as shown below.

High School

- Attendance is compulsory and classes are held five days per week
- 75 per cent classes and 25 per cent independent learning
- Teachers deliver content face-to-face
- Teachers direct learning and remind students about study responsibilities and assessment due dates
- Teachers approach students if they believe they need assistance
- Teachers highlight important information
- Teachers will review draft versions of assignments
- Assessment is more frequent and covers smaller amounts of material

- Parents receive biannual reports with grades A to F, and have access to parent-teacher interviews

University

- Students choose to enrol in university and class times and days vary
- 25 per cent classes and 75 per cent independent learning
- Lectures may be videoconferenced or delivered through online learning platforms
- Students are independent learners responsible for managing their study workloads and meeting assessment deadlines
- Students are expected to monitor their own progress and seek help if needed
- Students must review course and class content and identify important concepts
- Lecturers do not provide feedback on drafts
- Assessment is less frequent and covers larger amounts of learning material
- Results are only available to students and graded from High Distinction to Fail

Activity

1. Identify three things you are looking forward to about studying at university.
2. Identify three challenges that you might face in your first study period and consider proactive steps you can take to overcome each obstacle.

References

James Cook University. (2023). *GetReady4Uni: Module 1 – Transition to Uni*.
<https://www.jcu.edu.au/getready4uni/transition-to-uni>

MOTIVATION AND PURPOSE

Meghan Boland and Tony Hewitt



Figure 3. You will experience academic, cultural, emotional, financial, intellectual, and social adjustments at university. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

Motivation is a common challenge for university students throughout their degree. University courses are often 3-5 years of full-time study (and longer for part-time students), which is a significant period of time to remain highly motivated. Your sense of purpose for studying will often provide a beacon of light in the darkest times, so it is important to understand and remember why you are here!

"The only difference between success and failure is the ability to take action."

– Alexander Graham Bell

How to get motivated

Motivation can be intrinsic and come from an internal drive for personal satisfaction, enjoyment or benefit, or it can be an extrinsic, external drive to provide benefits to others, gain material wealth/possessions, or secure a specific job. Your values are often associated with intrinsic motivations whereas your goals are often attached to extrinsic motivations.

Identify your values and set goals

Motivation is what drives you to achieve what needs to be done. However, if you cannot see the benefits associated with a task, you may be unmotivated to achieve it. Studies have also shown that motivated students perceive academic workloads to be less than unmotivated students – that is, they don't feel overwhelmed by the same amount of work.

To help understand your motivations in life, reflect on the following questions:

- What is really important to you in life?
- What are you aspiring to achieve (personal and professional goals)?
- Identify a motivator for each goal (intrinsic or extrinsic)
- Are your goals specific, realistic and achievable?
- What are your short-term goals – next hour, day, or week?

If you struggled to answer these questions, don't despair. JCU has a great resource that can help you unpack your values, motivations and direction through the interactive You and Your Career module.

Sense of Purpose and Study

A sense of purpose is to find or enact your personal purpose in life in order to realise a satisfying future. It is overarching and often associated with aspects of empowerment, motivation and drive, and a willingness to sacrifice in the support of a higher purpose. For these reasons, it is an important to understand your sense of purpose in relation to higher education study.

Your sense of purpose is intrinsically unique to you and is influenced by your journey prior to study. Some

students know from an early age exactly what they want to do with their life. Some students don't know until after they start study, and many students change course while studying. This reflects the fact that your sense of purpose changes as you grow and you learn new things about the world and yourself. A higher education exposes students to new perspectives, theories, experiences and people, which can alter their original purpose and path. This altered worldview can be exciting and revelatory, but can also create anxiety and uncertainty if it undermines your original sense of purpose. The takeaway message is that it is normal and ok to not have it all figured out – just remain open to possibilities as they evolve.

Activity

Students decide to study at university for a range of extrinsic (external) and intrinsic (internal) reasons, which can impact on their sense of purpose and motivation levels. Review the list below of common reasons that students decide to go to university to see if any of them resonate with you.

- Someone told me to do it (family/friends)
- To prove to others that I can do it
- I want to change my financial future
- I want to make a difference in the world
- I like learning new things
- I wasn't sure what else to do
- I want to gain more self-confidence
- I missed educational opportunities in the past
- The degree will be useful in my current job/widen work options/increase promotion opportunities
- I want to be respected and recognised for my intellectual capacity
- To prove to myself that I can do it
- I want to gain educational qualifications
- It will help kickstart my dream career
- To widen my intellectual interests and skills
- It is the right time in my life
- I want to challenge myself
- I want to meet new people with the same interests.

References

James Cook University. (2023). *GetReady4Uni: Module 2 – Motivation and Purpose*.
<https://www.jcu.edu.au/getready4uni/motivation-and-purpose>

WELLBEING AND LIFE BALANCE

Meghan Boland and Tony Hewitt



Figure 4. Creating successful connections is an important part of university. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

Wellbeing is a combination of your physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social health, and is strongly linked to aspects of happiness and life satisfaction. Trying to achieve a balance of these factors is the best way to maintain optimal wellbeing. Each year, a national Student Experience Survey is deployed in Australian universities, which continues to show that maintaining mental and physical health while studying is the number one challenge that students face. While, managing their study/life balance is the second greatest challenge reported each year.

"Challenges are what make life interesting. Overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."

– Joshua J. Marine

Change and Challenges

The commencement of higher education involves a lot of life changes, which can be exciting, but also challenging. It is normal to have a range of feelings and emotions as you adjust to your new norm and find your feet over a period of time. Here are a list of common challenges that students face that can impact on their wellbeing:

- Balancing university with the rest of your life
- Managing deadlines and responsibilities
- Understanding academic expectations
- Financial changes and difficulties
- Moving away from home
- Building a new social network
- Managing carer responsibilities
- Failing an assessment or subject
- Breakdown of relationship
- Lack of motivation
- Illness or injury
- Exam anxiety

Stress Happens

A certain level of daily stress is beneficial as it can keep you energised, motivated and productive. However, too much can lead to a lack a concentration, impaired memory, inability to make decisions, avoidance behaviours (self-isolation, stop engaging with uni), and health issues. You may also experience physical symptoms, such as an increased heart rate, shortness of breath, muscle tension, nausea, reduce immunity, hot and cold flushes, and trouble sleeping. University involves change, challenges and moving outside your comfort zone, which your mind and body can perceive as threats and over activate your stress levels. These stressors can be cumulative, and too many stressors in a short period of time may trigger a response that begins to cause distress.

Top Tips

- **Accept stress as part of life:** Stress can't always be escaped, but it can be managed. Stress will be around when you leave university too, so see this time as an opportunity to learn new ways of dealing with it.
- **Know your stress triggers:** Everyone has particular things that trigger their stress responses – giving presentations, writing assignments, being in social situations, or being asked to do too many tasks at once. Knowing your triggers helps you prepare for those situations and activate strategies when your stress levels begin to rise.
- **Know your stress responses:** Are the first signs of your stress response that you begin to chew your fingernails, feel pain in your chest, get a headache or indigestion, lose concentration, eating more or less, or get irritable with yourself or others? Recognising your stress response is important, so you can implement wellbeing strategies to manage it.

Tips for Wellbeing

Taking care of your wellbeing will help you better cope with everyday stressors, and enable you to be more resilient when faced with unexpected challenges. Complete wellness is not realistic and no one is ever completely well or unwell – it's about achieving a good balance across all aspects of your health.

Be Healthy

- Consume nutritious food and eat regularly to keep your energy levels up – students often reach for junk foods when they are stressed and it is better to opt for brain foods instead (proteins, nuts, fruit and veg)
- Get quality sleep (eight hours a night) your brain needs time to shut down and process new information each day, so you are actually helping your studies as you snooze
- Exercise regularly or go for a brisk walk every day – it is the best stress reduction technique around
- Drink plenty of water – your brain is 73% H₂O, so it is vital for your cognitive functioning as well as your general wellbeing
- Moderate alcohol and caffeine intake and avoid drugs
- Take regular study breaks to help your mind and body rest and revive
- Learn relaxation, mindfulness and meditation techniques
- Have regular health check-ups with your GP

Be Kind to Yourself

- Acknowledge you are dealing with challenges and be self-compassionate
- Challenge negative thoughts and try to replace them with positive, encouraging ones – cognitive distortions or thinking errors (catastrophizing) can intensify when you are stressed or anxious
- Remind yourself of what's going well in your study and life to foster a sense of gratitude
- Focus on your strengths and values
- Have some 'me time' each day and do something that makes you feel good and helps you relax
- Know it is normal to feel unhappy some times
- Try and find humour in situations
- Learn to say 'no' – study involves a significant time and financial investment, so you will need to practice prioritising
- Seek help if you are experiencing persistent homesickness or loneliness, which are common occurrences in first-year students

Be Connected

- Schedule regular time with friends and family and talk about how you are feeling (good, bad and the ugly)
- Find people with similar interests and values to you and spend time together
- Ask another student to be a 'study buddy', or just catch up for a coffee regularly
- Play with your pets (or find a friend with a pet, if you don't have one) – it is great stress relief

Be in Control

- Don't worry about the past and the future as you have no control over them – you can only control the here and now (present moment)
- Focus on your 'sphere of control' – your response to people and things around you
- Plan your day, week and semester – being organised can help reduce concerns about the future
- Recognise the difference between a current, real problem and a hypothetical one, so you use your energy wisely
- Make changes to bring your life more in line with your values and long-term goals
- Accept that sometimes you need to take action and push yourself, even when you don't feel great
- Defuse your thinking – your thoughts are just words and pictures in your mind and you don't have to believe them or base actions on them all the time
- Remember that stressful times are usually finite, so they do come to an end – this truism can often help you cope in the moment
- Try not to make any major life decisions when you are feeling overwhelmed as things often seem worse when you are stressed or anxious.

Life Balance




"Balance is not something you find, it's something you create."

– Jana Kingsford

As outlined in the introduction to this module, study/life balance is the second greatest challenge facing Australian university students. This balance is often defined as a satisfactory level of involvement/fit between the multiple roles in a person's life. Learning to manage your time is an important life skill to develop, particularly when you are studying and have many conflicting priorities and deadlines. However, this schedule must also include time for your social, emotional, physical and intellectual wellbeing, as well as your paid work and study. By placing a priority on your wellbeing, your work and study will be more productive.

Below is an example of a student weekly planner (it includes: lecture/tutorials, work, sport, study time, and social activities):

Weekly planner example

Weekly Study Planner							
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8am-9am	ED1401 Reading Note taking (use effective reading guide)	ED1421 PMS	ED1421 Lecture	EL1100 Lecture	ED1421 tutorial prep assessment focus	WORK	
9am-10am		ED1401 Lecture Tues	EL1100 reading	Academic Writing Workshop			
10am-11am							
11am-12pm							
12pm-1pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	Active Learning Workshop	LUNCH	LUNCH	
1pm-2pm	ED1421 Reading lecture preparation	ED1401 tutorial preparation assessment focus	ED1401 tutorial	LUNCH	EL1100 workshop preparation	WORK	
2pm-3pm			EL1100 tutorial preparation	CATCH UP WITH FRIENDS			
3pm-4pm							
4pm-5pm				EL1100 tutorial			
5pm-6pm	DINNER		ED1421 tutorial	WORK			
6pm-7pm							
7pm-8pm	WORK						
8pm-9pm							

1. Lectures, tutorials and practicals
2. Work, sport
3. Study times: summarise notes, pre reading, draft assignments
4. Social activities



Figure 5. Weekly Planner. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Time management is important in order to achieve your aspirations and goals with the least amount of stress. JCU recommends that students allocate a minimum of 10-12 hours/week/subject to study commitments. Around 25% of your time will be spent attending classes/webinars and the other 75% will involve independent study. This self-directed study will include academic reading, reviewing/synthesising notes, completing tutorial exercises, group study, as well as assignment and exam preparation. For a full-time student studying three or four subjects, it is a significant time commitment (36-48 hours/week). It is helpful to create weekly and semester planners (see below) to stay on track and share these with your nearest and dearest (parents, partners, children), so there is a shared understanding of your study commitments. For more information about how James Cook University can support you during your studies. Please go to the JCU Student Support Webpage.

References

- James Cook University. (2023). *GetReady4Uni: Module 3 – Wellbeing and Life Balance*.
<https://www.jcu.edu.au/getready4uni/wellbeing-and-life-balance>

GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Colleen Kaesehagen



Figure 6. Selecting purposeful goals and priorities has the power to put you on track and on time in your journey to academic success. Image by Sajith Ranatunga used underCCO licence

Selecting goals and priorities has the power to put you on track and on time in your journey to academic success. This chapter provides strategies to help you get the best out of every day, every week and every year at university. The chapter discusses motivation, shows you how to construct SMART goals and how to “stick” with them. It also talks about long-term and short-term goals, how to prioritise to complete tasks and work to deadlines.

Goals Give Motivation

Motivation often means the difference between success and failure. That applies to school, to specific tasks, and to life in general. One of the most effective ways to keep motivated is to set goals. Goals can be big or small. A goal can range from *I am going to write one extra page tonight*, to *I am going to work to get an A in this course*, and all the way to *I am going to graduate in the top of my class so I can start my career with a really good position*. Goals work towards the bigger picture. For example, if your goal is to get an A in a certain course, all the reading, studying, and every assignment you do for that course contributes to the larger goal.

You are motivated to do each of those things and to do them well. Goal setting is best done with careful thought and planning. This next section will explain how you can apply strategies to set goals.

SMART Goals

Goals need to be *specific* and represent an *end result*. They should also be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). A SMART goal will help you achieve an end result and support your decision making. Each component of a SMART goal will be described in more detail below.

- **Specific**—For a goal to be specific, it must be carefully defined. A goal of *get a good job when I graduate* is too general. It doesn't define what a good job is. A more specific goal would be something like *identify a hospital that recruits graduate nurses and has clear career paths*.
- **Measurable**—To show effect, and report progress, goals need to be measured. What this means is that the goal should have clearly defined outcomes with enough detail to measure them. For example, setting a goal of *doing well at university* is a bit undefined, but making a goal of *graduating with a grade point average (GPA) above 4.0 at university* is measurable and something you can work with.
- **Attainable**—*Attainable* or *achievable* goals means they are reasonable and within your ability to accomplish. While a goal to *complete six subjects in a semester and work part time* is something that would be nice to achieve, the odds that you could make that happen in a semester are not very realistic for most students. However, if you plan to *complete three subjects this semester and work part time* it may well be more achievable.
- **Relevant**—For goal setting, *relevant* means it applies to the situation. In relation to university, a goal of *buying a horse to ride to for pleasure on weekends* is unlikely to be relevant to your student goals, particularly if you live 100km from campus, but *getting dependable transportation to the campus* is something that would contribute to your success at university.
- **Time-bound**—Time-bound means you set a specific time frame to achieve the goal. *I will get my paper written by Wednesday* is time-bound. You know when you must meet the goal. *I will get my paper written sometime soon* does not help you plan how and when you will accomplish the goal.

In the following table you can see some examples of goals that do and do not follow the SMART system (see Table 1). As you read each one, think about what elements make them SMART or how you might change those that are not.

Table 1. Examples of goals that do and do not follow the SMART system

Goal	Is it SMART?	Comments
I am going to be rich someday	No	There is nothing specific, measurable, or time-bound in this goal.
I will graduate with a GPA of 4.0 by the end of next year.	Yes	The statement calls out specific, measurable, and time-bound details. The other attributes of attainable and relevant are implied. This goal can also be broken down to create smaller, semester or even weekly goals.
I will walk for 30 mins each day to help me relieve stress.	Yes	All SMART attributes are covered in this goal, explicitly or implied.
I would like to do well in all my courses next semester.	No	While this is clearly time-bound and meets most of the SMART goal attributes, it is not specific or measurable without defining what “do well” means.
I will earn at least a 4.0 GPA in all my courses next semester by seeking help from the Learning Advisor (Maths).	Yes	All the SMART attributes are present in this goal.
I am going to start being more organised.	No	While most of the SMART attributes are implied, there is nothing really measurable in this goal.

When goal setting it is important to write down your goals, keep them visible, and revisit each one every couple of weeks to make sure you are on track. It is also useful to discuss your goals with a critical friend who will help you to be realistic and support you to achieve your goals.

Stick With It!

The key to reaching goals is to stick with them, keep yourself motivated, and overcome obstacles along the way. In the graphic below, you will find seven methods successful people use to accomplish their goals (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Seven ways to stay motivated. Image adapted from OpenStax used under [CC-BY 4.0 licence](#)

Keeping focused and motivated can be challenging as there are so many other things to do. Procrastination

can be a problem when studying. How well we persevere towards goal or task can be referred to as “grit”. Grit drives us to succeed and to get back up when things seem hard. Grit is not about how clever you are, it is about how much you keep going until something is finished or accomplished.

Grit was defined by the psychologist Angela Duckworth and colleagues (Duckworth et al., 2007). They found that individuals with high grit were able to maintain motivation in learning tasks despite failures. The results showed that grit and perseverance were better predictors of academic success and achievement than talent or IQ. Paul Stoltz (2015) has since taken the grit concept and turned it into an acronym (GRIT) to help people remember and use the attributes of a *grit mindset*. His acronym is Growth, Resilience, Instinct, and Tenacity. Each element is explained in the table below (see Table 2).

Table 2. The GRIT acronym

Growth	Your inclination to seek and consider new ideas, alternatives, different approaches, and fresh perspectives
Resilience	Your capacity to respond constructively and to manage all kinds of adversity
Instinct	Your capacity to pursue the right goals in the best and smartest ways
Tenacity	The degree to which you persist, commit to, stick with, and achieve your goals

With a “grit” mindset comes an acceptance that you may not succeed on the first attempt—or the nineteenth attempt. Failed attempts are part of the process and seen as a very useful way to gain knowledge that moves you towards success. Sometimes we need to look at *how* we are doing something to find out *why* we are unsuccessful. When we are honest about the reasons *why*, we can then start to manage the situation and set goals. We get back up and start again.

Long-Term Goals and Short-Term Goals

Long-term goals are future goals that often take years to complete. An example of a long-term goal might be to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree within four years. Long-term goals are not exclusive to academic study. You might set long-term goals related to fitness, wellness, and relationships. When you set a long-term goal in any aspect of your life, you are demonstrating a commitment to dedicate time and effort towards making progress in that area.

Setting short-term goals helps you consider the necessary steps you'll need to take, and also helps to chunk a larger effort into smaller, more manageable tasks. Even when your long-term goals are SMART, it's easier to stay focused and you'll become less overwhelmed in the process of completing short-term goals.

You might assume that short-term and long-term goals are different goals that vary in the length of time they take to complete. Instead of just being bound by the difference of time, short-term goals are the action steps that take less time to complete than a long-term goal, but that help you work towards your long-term goals.

I'm motivated to study by thinking long term – so I'm already seeing myself in a classroom teaching children.

Amanda Grace
Education Student

Prioritisation

1. Email Professor Raymond
2. Post in poly sci discussion forum
3. Psych project
4. Kyleigh's bday!!!

Stop at financial aid – fseog

Figure 8. Numbered lists are useful and easy tools to create. Image by OpenStax used under CC-BY 4.0 licence

A key component in goal setting and time management is that of prioritisation. Prioritisation is ordering tasks and allotting time, based on their identified needs or value. To prioritise tasks you need to understand the requirements of each. If you have multiple assignments to complete and you assume one of those assignments will only take an hour, you may decide to put it off until the others are finished. Your assumption could be disastrous if you find, once you begin the assignment, that there are several extra components that you did not account for and the time to complete will be four times as long as you estimated. It is important to understand exactly what needs to be done to complete a task before you determine its priority.

To better see how things may need to be prioritised, you could make a list of tasks to be completed and then arrange them in a quadrant map based on importance and urgency. This is called the Eisenhower Decision Matrix.

Begin by making a list of things you need to do today and then draw the grid below. Write each item in one of the four squares. Choose the square that best describes it based on its urgency and its importance. When you have completed writing each of the tasks in its appropriate square, you will see a prioritisation order of your tasks. Those listed in the Important and Urgent square will be the things you need to finish first. After that will come things that are “important but not urgent,” followed by “not important, but urgent,” and finally “not urgent and not important” (see Figure 9).

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Urgent and Important <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper due tomorrow • Apply for internship by deadline 	Not Urgent but Important <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam next week • Flu shot
Not Important	Urgent but Not Important <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amazon sale • Laundry 	Not Urgent and Not Important <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check social • TV show

Figure 9. The Eisenhower Matrix can help organise priorities and ensure that you focus on the correct tasks. Image by OpenStax used under [CC-BY 4.0 licence](#)

It is also important to think of other impacts on your time. Keeping others informed about your priorities may help avert possible conflicts (e.g., letting your boss know you will need time on a certain evening to study; letting your friends know you plan to do a project on Saturday but can do something on Sunday, etc.). Time management in university is as much about managing all the elements of your life as it is about managing time for class and to complete assignments. Regardless of how much you have planned,

sometimes events arise where it becomes almost impossible to accomplish everything you need to by the time required. As the saying goes, “things happen.” In this situation prioritisation becomes important. When this occurs with university assignments, it is important to not feel overwhelmed by the situation and rather to make an informed decision based on the value and impact of your choice.

Priority Conflicts

Imagine a situation where you have two assignments due at a similar time, and you must decide which one you to work on first. For example, one of the assignments may only be worth a minimal number of points towards your total grade, but it may be foundational to the rest of the course. The first step is to try to find a way to get everything finished. If that cannot happen, the next step would be to communicate with your lecturers to let them know about the situation. They may have options you had not considered. The key here is to make certain you are aware of and understand all the ramifications to help make the best decision when the situation dictates you make a hard choice among priorities.

Completing Tasks

Another important part of time management is to develop approaches that help you complete tasks in an efficient manner that works for you.

Knowing what you need to do

Understanding what you need to do and when you need to do it can be applied to any task, no matter how simple or how complex. Knowing what you need to do and planning for it can go a long way towards success. As you can see from the graphic below (see Figure 10), a task as simple as “going to class” can be broken down into a number of different elements that have are dependent on other tasks. One example of this is preparing for the class lecture by reading materials ahead of time in order to make the lecture and any complex concepts easier to follow. If you did it the other way around, you might miss opportunities to ask questions or receive clarification on the information presented during the lecture.

Element or Task Needed for Success	Task it Depends on
Pre-class Prep	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing previous homework • Reading appropriate material for lecture • Taking notes on areas that need clarification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding homework assigned from previous class • Making certain appropriate reading material is identified • Reading appropriate material for lecture
<div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> During Class	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding lecture • Taking notes on lecture • Asking questions for clarification • Taking part in class discussion • Receive assignments for next class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading appropriate material • Understanding lecture • Reading appropriate material, Understanding lecture • Reading appropriate material, Understanding lecture
<div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> Post-Class	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding homework assigned • Making certain appropriate reading material is identified • Ask questions for clarification • Reviewing and rewriting notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive assignments for next class • Receive assignments for next class • Receive assignments for next class

Figure 10. Many of your learning activities are dependent on others, and some are the gateways to other steps. Image by OpenStax used under [CC-BY 4.0 licence](#)

Knowing how you will get it done

After you have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to complete a task, the next step is to create a plan for completing everything. This may not be as easy or as simple as declaring that you will finish part one, then move on to part two, and so on. Each component may need different resources or skills to complete, and it is in your best interest to identify those ahead of time and include them as part of your plan.

Knowing what resources will you need



Figure 11. Allowing time to think is an important part of learning. Image by Pexels used under CC0 licence

Make a list of the everything you will need to complete a task. If a missing resource is important, the entire project can come to a complete halt. Even if the missing resource is a minor component, it may still dramatically alter the end result. Learning activities are much the same in this way. List everything you need. It is also important to remember that resources may not be limited to physical objects such as paper or ink. Information can be a critical resource as well. In fact, one of the most often overlooked aspects in planning by new university students is just how much research, reading, and information they will need to complete assignments.

Knowing what skills will you need

Poor planning and assumptions can be disastrous. No matter how well you planned the other parts of the project, if there is some skill needed that you do not have and you have no idea how long it will take to learn, it can be a impact on your planning.

Imagine a scenario where your class projects is to create a poster. It is your intent to use some kind of imaging software to produce professional-looking graphics and charts for the poster, but you have never used the software in that way before. It seems easy enough, but once you begin, you find the charts keep printing out in the wrong resolution. You search online for a solution, but the only thing you can find requires you to recreate them all over again in a different setting. Unfortunately, that part of the project will now take twice as long.

It can be extremely difficult to recover from a situation like that, and it could have been prevented by taking the time to learn how to do it correctly before you began or by at least including in your schedule some time to learn and practise.

Set Deadlines

The best way to approach time management is to set realistic deadlines that take into account which elements are dependent on others and the order in which they should be completed. Giving yourself two days to write a ten page essay is not very realistic when even many professional authors average only six pages per day. Your intentions may be well founded, but your use of unrealistic deadlines will not be very successful. Setting appropriate deadlines and sticking to them is very important.

Be Flexible

The final item on this list after a strong encouragement to make deadlines and stick to them is the suggestion to be flexible. The reason that “be flexible” has made this list is because even the best-laid plans and most accurate time management efforts can take an unexpected turn. The idea behind being flexible is to readjust your plans and deadlines when something does happen to throw things off. The worst thing you could do in such a situation is panic or just stop working because the next step in your careful planning has suddenly become a roadblock. The moment when you see that something in your plan may become an issue is when to begin readjusting your plan.

Adjusting a plan along the way is incredibly common. It is a good idea to planning for problems, or delays from the beginning, and even add a little extra time for each task to help ensure an issue does not derail the entire project. As you work through tasks, make certain you are always monitoring and adapting to ensure you complete them.

Being flexible is helpful as sometimes it can feel overwhelming when there are too many changes needed within a short amount of time. It can help to stand back occasionally and look at the big picture to remind yourself of your major priorities for your life while at university. You may find it helpful to draw a learning map and place it on your wall to remind yourself of what really matters to you – where you will be flexible and where you won't.

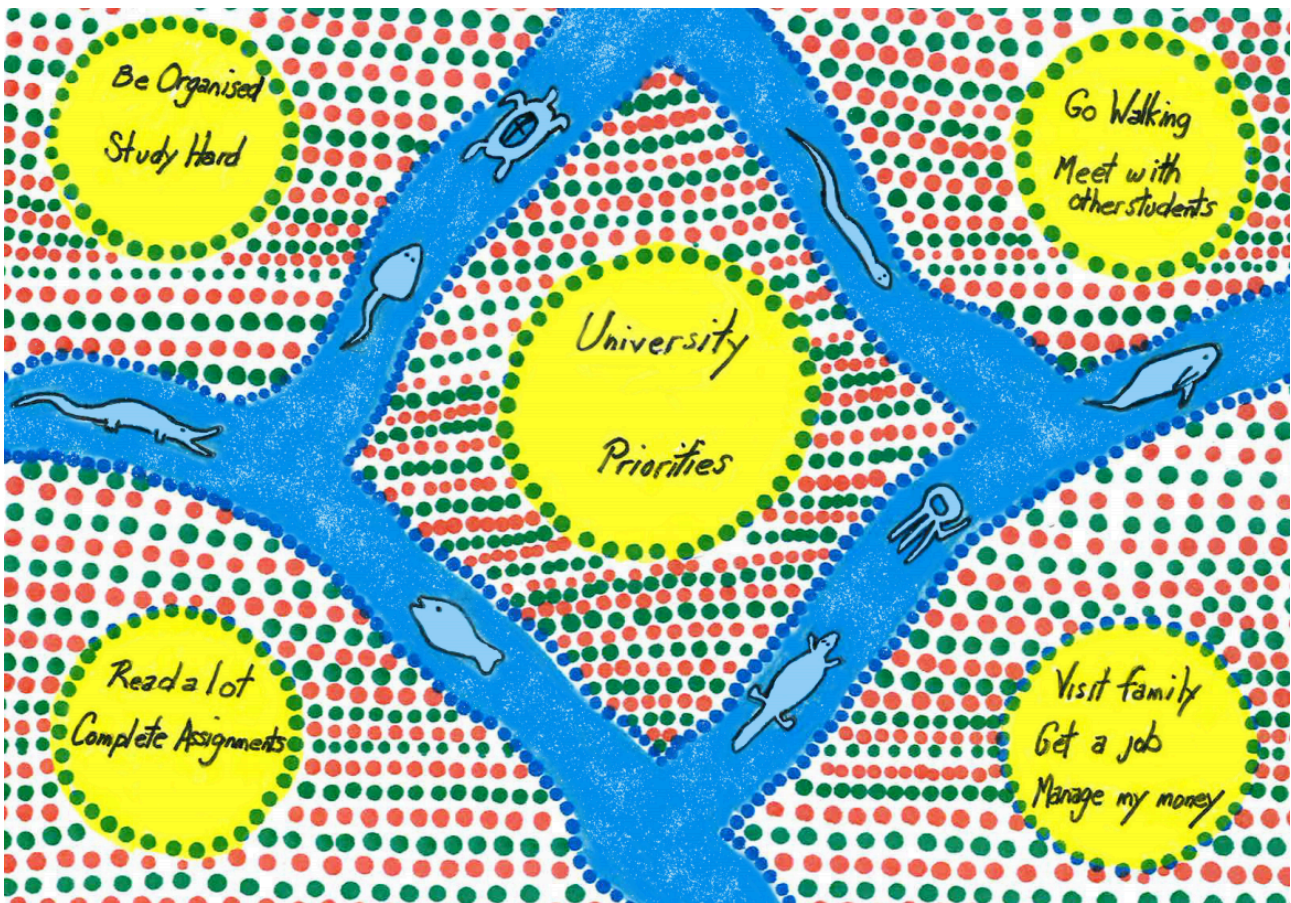


Figure 12. You may find it helpful to draw a learning map and place it on your wall to remind yourself of what really matters to you. Image by Sam Conway.

Conclusion

Goal setting and prioritisation are essential in the first year of university and beyond. Learning effective approaches to goal setting and managing priority conflicts takes time, but the steps covered in this chapter provide a strong foundation to get students started. Using a structured approach to identifying achievable goals that are personally meaningful allows you to plan for both short and long-term success. Overtime, prioritisation may also become easier as you gain experience. Keep the key points in mind to help maintain your motivation as you transition into university life.

Key points

- One of the most effective ways to keep motivated is to set goals.
- SMART Goals are a useful structured approach to plan, write down, commit to, and

achieve meaningful goals.

- The key to reaching goals is to keep at it, keep yourself motivated, and overcome any obstacles along the way.
- Apply grit and adopt an attitude that looks directly to the end goal as the only acceptable outcome.
- Setting short-term goals helps you consider the necessary steps you'll need to take to achieve your long-term goals, but it also helps to chunk a larger effort into smaller, more manageable tasks.
- Prioritisation is a key component of goal setting and time-management which involves ordering tasks, and allotting time for them based on their identified needs or value.
- If you find that you have a priority conflict, make certain you are aware of and understand all the ramifications to help make the best decision.
- Knowing what you need to do and planning for it can go a long way towards successfully completing tasks. You might need specific resources or skills.

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PART B: SUCCESSFUL FOUNDATIONS



Successful Foundations

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UNIVERSITY LIFE ONLINE

Rhian Morgan



Figure 13. Much of university life is lived online. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

Universities are highly technological and much of university life is lived online. To succeed at university, students must be confident working with technologies and digitally literate. This means being able to understand, use, adapt to, and innovate with technology. This chapter begins by exploring why digital literacy is important and how it is relevant to university life. Next, it examines what universities will expect of you in terms of digital life. The chapter then outlines the digital attitudes, attributes and skills you will need to develop, and how these relate to other skills and attributes, such as finding information online. By developing each of the elements that will be discussed in this chapter, you will be well equipped for online university life.

What is a Digitally Literate Student?

People develop digital literacy throughout their lives. From using a mobile phone or typing a document, to manipulating data and engaging in social media, digital literacy is an important facet of every part of everyday life. Being digitally literate means having the skills, knowledge and attitudes that equip you for living, learning, working and flourishing in today's technological society. All elements of these skills, knowledge and attitudes are interrelated and interdependent.

Digital literacy attitudes include being curious, open to learning, resilient to change in technology and being collaborative. Digital literacy skills encompass elements such as:

- Core computing and networking skills and knowledge to operate in a university environment (which underpin the other elements); (see below for more information)
- Skills and understanding about information sources and the media, so you can access the information you need to study and work, and ensure that it is the right information;
- The ability to create online objects such as assignments, images, presentations, audio, video and other things such as spreadsheets or data;
- Participating in online discussions, collaborations and groups while communicating effectively and appropriately online;
- Being able to use the online learning systems at your university and beyond for ongoing professional development and learning; and
- Being able to manage your “digital identity” at university and beyond into professional life and be ethical, responsible and legal in your online life.

You will develop digital literacy throughout your university journey and throughout the rest of your life. It is important to understand that digital literacy is:

- *Scaffolded*, so you don't need to know everything from the start, and you will build on your knowledge and skills as you learn.
- *Supported*, as your university will provide you with opportunities to learn new skills and develop your understanding and attitudes to digital technologies and online learning. Look for opportunities through orientation, information technology (IT) training, library training, study support training and online resources.
- *General*, as some skills and capabilities are important for all students, and *Specific*, as other skills and capabilities are specific to a discipline or profession; and some disciplines and professions will require a much higher level of expertise and ability than others.

Digital Literacy and Universities



Figure 14. Student studying Bachelor of Advanced Science. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

When you come to university, you will likely encounter a range of new technologies, systems, and environments that you will be expected to use throughout your studies. It is important to become familiar with these new platforms and tools in order to develop the skills you need for successful study.

In order to succeed at university, you will need to use:

- Your student email for communicating with lecturers;
- An online calendar for planning your class timetable and assessment schedule;
- LearnJCU (the learning management system) for accessing learning resources, posting on discussion boards, and submitting assignments;
- Blackboard Collaborate for live online lectures and workshops
- Library resources, such as journal articles, library guides, and eBooks; and,
- Productivity software, like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint to complete assignments.

You may also want to using social media or messaging apps to communicate with other students and collaborate on team projects or assessments. It is also important to learn about the threats that online life can bring. Threats to your privacy, professional image, and academic success can be magnified if you don't live your life online securely, safely and ethically. The student IT Essentials webpage contains all the information you need in order to manage your account and access the technologies you will need for study. Developing your digital literacy skills will help you make the most of the resources available to you.

University Essentials

Starting university is a time when you will begin to collaborate online with others, either in your course or in the wider university social networks, whether it is in forums run by your lecturer or via the university's

social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Interacting with your lecturers and fellow students online will present additional chances to collaborate and co-operate to facilitate high levels of engagement. Your ability to navigate and interact in a positive way using these education and social environments will broaden your learning experiences and expedite understanding. All these lead to success both in your studies and your professional life.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=64#oembed-1>

There are many positives to engaging with the platforms offered by your university. You will broaden your access to learning environments and be able to create networks with your colleagues and peers, as well as experts and mentors in your field. You will develop your online identity and improve your online interpersonal skills through communication, using both official and unofficial university systems and social media platforms. You will also develop digital problem-solving skills, and learn to innovate, collaborate, and create content in online environments.

Table 3. Digital tools and collaboration opportunities

Official University Social Media	Awards, programs, partnerships, news and events, e.g. ANZAC Day, Harmony Day, graduation, career development, workshops.
Twitter	Follow academics, librarians, industries, and organisations for news, events and information on research.
LinkedIn	Career information, professional development and training opportunities, and networking.
University Website	Student hubs, sporting groups, career opportunities, cultural activities, faith groups, international student support, library support.
LearnJCU Discussion Boards	Subject information, assessment and referencing discussions, peer-review and lecturers' support for assignments.
Unofficial groups and pages (Student run)	Collaboration opportunities and study groups e.g. Discord, Slack, Snapchat and Facebook groups.

Being digitally literate is not only about engaging with these platforms, but also understanding the threats that exist when interacting with these online platforms, especially the unofficial, unmoderated sites.

Table 4. Online threats and avoiding them

Stealing your identity or hacking your accounts	Do not give out personal information unless you trust the person asking for it, and set your passwords so they are hard to guess Remember: if it looks suspicious, it probably is!
Access to your financial data	Do not open email attachments from untrusted sources, and never give out your financial information to anyone you do not trust.
Bullying, cyberstalking and tracking	Be careful what you share online, both information and images, and always remember that others are watching you online. Make sure you report bullying incidents to your university or other relevant authorities.
Collusion and academic misconduct	Collusion on individual assessments may carry heavy penalties and universities watch carefully for instances where students are not completing their own work (see the chapter “Integrity at University” for more information).
Misinformation and conspiracy theories	Be careful about what information you trust and share online (see the chapter “Working with Information” for more information).

Remember, at university, knowing how to engage is important as you are expected to communicate professionally. Be aware of what you post, your tone, and your words as they will be there for all to read. Understanding the principles of online communication will help you at university and in your communications outside of the university. It is not uncommon for recruiters to examine your online profiles to evaluate if you are a suitable candidate, so choose and use your social media channels wisely. Building your digital identity and creating positive relationships with others online increases your chances of academic success.

Learning Online



Figure 15. Videoconferencing is an important part of university life. Image by Anna Shvets used under CC0 licence

Studying at university means being able to study in an online environment. It means using technology to participate in classes, access materials, complete assessment, and collaborate with your lecturers. It also means being able to learn new technologies and find information in the online world. Learning online brings both benefits and challenges. It can be difficult to access everything you need to study effectively. Sometimes, learning online can even be lonely. At the same time, the flexibility of being able to engage with study materials at your own pace and at times that suit you can be really beneficial. However, it is also easy to get distracted and inconsistent work practices can impact your productivity. The JCU Learning Centre has a range of resources and guides that can help you develop positive online study habits, such as:

- Tips about online learning using video lectures and collaborate sessions, including information on taking notes, and communicating with staff and classmates;
- Information about using online communication tools, like Blackboard Collaborate, discussion boards, and Zoom; and,
- Guides on creating a positive study environment that include information about tools, technologies, working from home, and planning your study time.

When learning online, it is important to see your development of digital literacy skills and attributes as a journey; you will develop skills throughout your studies and again throughout your life. Maintaining the *digital literacy attitudes* and developing the *skills and attributes* to outlined in the diagram below will help you in this journey.



Figure 16. Attitudes, Attributes and Skills for University Life Online. Image by USQ used under CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 licence

Conclusion

In the modern world, it is very important to be digitally literate. Digital literacy encompasses the attitudes, attributes and skills with technology and digital environments that will help you study at university and thrive in your future workplace.

As a university student, you must be able to engage with the technologies, environments and social networks that your university will expect you to use. Your university will help you to develop digital literacy as part of your work and study, and to build on those skills and attributes to the level required by your

discipline and future employment. You must have core computing skills underpinning other attributes to study online, communicate and collaborate, be secure, safe and ethical, and to find and use information.

Key points

- To succeed with university life online, you must be able to understand, use, adapt to and innovate with technology.
- Being digitally literate means having the skills, knowledge and attitudes that equip you for living, learning, working and flourishing in a today's technological society.
- You must be able to study in the online environment, use your university's digital systems, and communicate and collaborate online.
- You will develop your digital literacy attitudes and skills throughout your study and again throughout your life.

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STUDY SPACE

Colleen Kaesehagen



Figure 17. Where you do your study can affect your ability to work well. Image by Free Photos used under [CCO licence](#)

Introduction

The environment where you do your study can influence your ability to work well. This chapter will encourage you to think about how you can create a space to best encourage productive results when you work. It begins with explaining why your study space is important, how to choose a suitable space, and how to set it up. Electronic devices are also considered in your reorganisation. The chapter also explores how to minimise distractions, and how to identify alternative study locations. The section finishes by considering the optimal time of day for you to work in your study space. Altogether, this chapter can equip you with ideas and plans to get the best out of your study space, and ultimately help you on your journey to academic success.

Your study space matters

The space where you study plays a large part in ensuring you work effectively. Your environment can not only aid your efficiency but also impact whether you complete work at all. One example of this might be typing on a laptop. While it might seem more comfortable to lie back on a couch to type a long paper, sitting up at a table actually increases your typing speed and reduces the number of mistakes. Even deciding whether to use a mouse and mouse pad or not can impact how quickly you work.

There are other factors that can affect your productivity. For example, is there enough room? Is there a place to keep reference materials within arm's reach while working? Is there anything you can do to make working easier or more efficient? For example, could you buy an inexpensive second monitor so you can have more than one document displayed at a time? Your workspace is another important resource you can use for academic success. The key is to discover what works for you, and that begins with finding yourself a suitable space for study.

Choosing a Space

A good study space has a few basic requirements. It needs a desk or table, a chair, access to power, an internet signal, and a good light source. Your space should be cool or warm enough for your comfort as you study.



Figure 18. Try to make your study space a welcoming place you want to be in. Image by Prateek Katyal used under [CC0 licence](#)

If possible, find an area you can use exclusively for your study sessions and leave it set up all the time. Spaces with multiple purposes can have challenges. You may have to try out numerous spaces to find what works best for you.

Whatever your space limitations, make a place that you can dedicate to your reading, writing, notetaking, and reviewing. If you really don't have any options at home for an exclusive study space, you could be to create a study box. A study box holds all the study supplies you need to access while working at a desk, such as a pen, note paper, a flash drive and a folder of notes. This box isn't meant to hold every single item related

to university, rather it holds only what you need to do your work right now. It means you can open the box quickly and be set up and ready to work within a few minutes. While a permanent study space is always a better option, a study box can be the next best thing to get you working fast in a shared space, instead of wasting time looking for a pen.

Setting Up Your Study Space

Now that you've chosen your space, it's time to get it ready for use. You can begin to add stationery items to help you work, such as writing paper, notebooks, pens, pencils, markers, an eraser and highlighters. You will also need to add materials that are specific to the course you are studying, such as textbooks or a calculator. Remove excess clutter to make the most of the space you have. Having a neat and tidy desk can help you to feel in calm and in control when the work starts piling up.



Figure 19. Which desk is an inviting place to start your study? Image by Ali West used under [CC-BY 2.0 licence](#)

Setting up a dedicated spot to work may help trigger motivation to study. Setting the right atmosphere in your study space can generate a study-mood in your mind. But don't wait for the study fairy to appear before you start working. Sit down at your desk, follow your study plan, start work, and she'll show up.

Bonus Items

There are some bonus items you may consider adding. You could, for example, add a wall calendar, a card with an inspiring quote, or even a diffuser to add a pleasant aroma to the room. Here are some more ideas of what students like to add to their study space. Don't add all of the items or your space may end up cluttered. Just pick some that you value most:



Figure 20. Considering adding bonus items to make your study space even more productive and enjoyable. Image by Jess Bailey Designs used under CC0 licence

- a notice board
- a whiteboard
- sticky notes
- a favourite pen and pen holder
- a decorative mouse pad
- a file holder for frequently used documents
- a spare pair of reading glasses
- a printer and paper
- a dictionary and thesaurus
- headphones
- a stress ball
- a desk lamp
- a book stand
- decorations (e.g., a photograph, a painting, a plant)
- a sit-stand adjustable desktop
- a clock
- kitchen timer
- rubbish bin
- filing cabinet or filing box
- bookshelf

There are many different ways you can make your study space work for you. You may enjoy searching

the internet for ideas of how others have set up simple areas or more elaborate arrangements. Look at the images below of one table presented six different ways to prompt your thinking.



Figure 21. There are many different ways you can make your study space work for you. Image by Wendy Hargreaves and Tristan Hargreaves used under CC-BY-NC licence

Organising Your Electronic Desktop

Spend some time organising your electronic space if you are using a computer for your studying. A cluttered electronic desktop can be just as distracting and time consuming as a cluttered wooden desktop.

Take the time to, clear some digital space and set up new storage folders for your new subjects with a simple and easily accessible filing system.

Save your regularly accessed university sites as links in your browser. Place on your dock or task bar the applications you want to access quickly. Always plan how you intend to back-up your electronic work periodically so there are no last-minute disasters of lost assignments if your computer unexpectedly crashes.

Avoiding Distractions

When considering what to add into your study space it is also worth considering distractions. Remove anything that is in danger of distracting you from your study. By making it harder to access distractions, you decrease their power to tempt you. For example, what happens when it is easier to keep working through a tricky equation than it is to go down stairs to the kitchen, pull up a chair, stand on it, and reach up onto top of a cupboard to where you put your mobile, wait for it to turn on, and then text your friend? Suddenly “just” finishing off those sums seems less effort than “just” sending a text.



Figure 22. Video games are a common distraction, but even tedious activities like cleaning can be a distraction from studying.
Image by [Jeshoots](#) used under [CC0 licence](#)

There will always be distractions. Video games, television, movies, surfing the internet, music, friends and even housecleaning can distract us from doing something else we need to do, like study for an exam.

Mobile phones, tablets, and portable computers have brought *distraction* to an entirely new level. We have all become attached to the ability to check in on social media or with family and friends via text, chat, and calls. If you're working on your computer, switch off those pop-up notifications that draw you away from your study task.

If you set a specific amount of time to study without interruptions, you can convince your mind that you will soon be able to return to your link to the outside world. Start small and set an alarm on a kitchen timer—a 30-minute period to review notes, then a brief break, then another 45-minute study session to

quiz yourself on the material, and so on. By using a kitchen timer instead of your phone, you remove the temptation to access your phone.

When you prepare for your study session, remember to do these things:

- Put your phone in another room or at least some place where you will not see or hear it vibrate or ring. Just flipping it over is not enough.
- Turn off the television or music
- Turn off notifications on your computer
- Unless you are deliberately working with a study group, study somewhere alone or at least away from others enough to not hear them talking.

If you live with other people, see if you can negotiate some space alone to study. Ask others to leave one part of the house or an area in one room as a quiet zone during certain hours. Most people will respect your educational goals and be willing to accommodate you.

Many people say they work better with the television or the radio on, but the truth is that an environment with too many interruptions is rarely helpful when focus is required. If you find that your work is better without distractions, it is a good idea to create an environment that reduces interruptions. This may mean you have to go to a private room, use the university library, or use headphones, when you work. The importance of a distraction-free environment cannot be emphasised enough.

Alternative Study Spaces



Figure 23. The park or the library could be an alternative study space. Image by Armin Rimoldi used under CC0 licence

If you don't have a dedicated study space at home, there are alternative spaces that can be used. These might include your university library, community libraries, a coffee shop or local parks. When you are experimenting with locations outside of your home for study, be attuned to what genuinely works. Be conscious of the tradeoffs when picking a secondary study space. If it takes you time to pack a bag of

resources, travel to a place and order a coffee, then consider what is the ratio of productive output against time lost? Be honest in your assessment in order to make secondary study spaces work for you, not against you.

Life circumstances can also create blocks of potential study time in places you don't normally associate with study, such as waiting beside a soccer field for your child to finish training or sitting in a dental surgery waiting room. Consider, what sort of tasks can you complete effectively in these alternative study spaces? If it is a regular event, can you have a prepacked bag or box ready with what you need? You could create a folder (physical or electronic) that stores your reading matter, ready to be accessed when you find yourself with unplanned time.

Studying at the Right Time

Most people are subject to their own rhythms, and preferences. Some people prefer to study in the mornings, while others prefer to work after everyone else has gone to sleep. Be aware of your preferences and to use them to your advantage. Your study environment includes your mental and physical wellbeing. Both influence on your learning and productivity. It is important to be aware of your work preferences and to actually try to create conditions that help you in these areas. One approach is to set aside a specific time to do certain kinds of work. You might find that you concentrate better after you have eaten a meal. If that is the case, make it a habit of doing homework every night after dinner. Some people find that they are more creative during a certain time of the day or that they are more comfortable writing with subtle lighting. It is worth taking the time to find the conditions that work best for you so that you can take advantage of them.

Conclusion

A well-considered study space has the power to impact your academic success. Set up your study space and stay mindful of what honestly works for you and what doesn't. The decisions you make about where you work and when you work can really make a difference to your productivity. Spending a little time creating the best environment is time well spent.

Key points

- Where you study affects how well you study.
- Choose a space with a desk, chair, power, internet signal, light and a comfortable temperature.

- If possible, keep your space permanently set up just for your study.
- Consider using a study box if you can't maintain a permanent space of your own.
- Add essential stationery items and study materials to your space.
- A well organised desk can motivate you to study.
- Adding bonus items can make your space more productive and enjoyable.
- Organise your electronic desktop as well as your physical desk.
- Remove distractions from your study space.
- Tell people that you are unavailable during a set study time.
- Find some alternative study spaces to supplement your home study space.
- Find the time of day when you concentrate best to work in your study space.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Colleen Kaesehagen

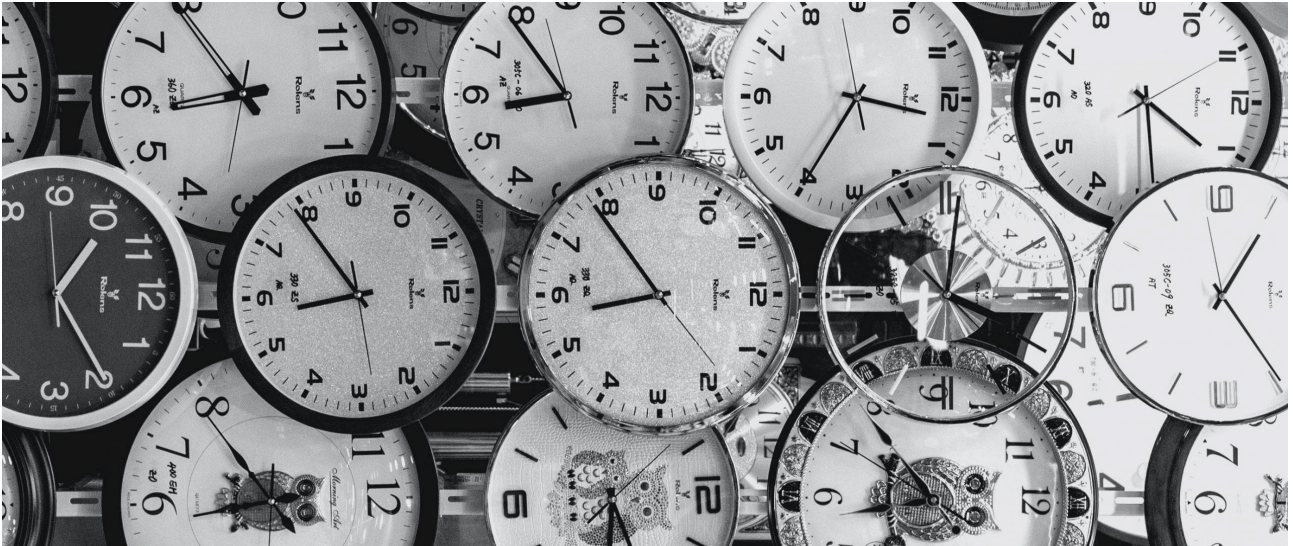


Figure 24. Students manage their own study time. Image by [Andrey Grushnikov](#) used under [CC0 licence](#)

Introduction

Poor time management is a common challenge facing students in higher education. Avoiding this challenge can be accomplished through prioritisation and time management efforts. This chapter provides looks at time management and how to identify your time management style. You will learn how to conduct a time audit of your life and create a semester, weekly and daily plan. Following this, an examination of how to break up tasks into manageable time frames and tips from three proven time management strategies will help keep you on track to graduate from university on time.

Time Management at University

Time management at university can be very different from anything you have experienced previously. At university, time management is left up to you. While it is true that there are assignment due dates and organised classroom activities, learning at the university level requires more than just the simple completion of work. It involves decision-making and the ability to evaluate information. This is best accomplished when you are an active partner in your own learning activities.

You can expect to spend much more time on learning activities outside the classroom than you will in the classroom. Most courses have a workload of 120 hours each semester. This is a workload of 10-12 hours

each week to attend or listen to lectures and tutorials, prepare for assessments, and to read study material. Some weeks may be more intense, depending on the time of the semester and the courses you are taking. Not only will you be learning on a larger scale, but the depth of understanding and knowledge you will put into it will be significantly more than you may have encountered previously. This is because there are greater expectations required of university graduates in the workplace. Nearly any profession that requires a university degree has with it a level of responsibility that demands higher-level thinking and therefore higher learning.

Identifying your Time Management Style

Managing time and prioritising tasks are not only valuable skills for pursuing an education, but they can become abilities that follow you through the rest of your life, especially if your career takes you into a leadership role.



Figure 25. An online calendar is a very useful tool for keeping track of classes, meetings, and other events. Most learning management systems contain these features, or you can use a calendar application. Image by OpenStax used under [CC-BY 4.0 licence](#)

Table 5 is an exercise that is intended to help you recognise some things about your own time management style, and identify any areas where you might be able to improve. Think about the answer that best represents your position on each statement.

Table 5. Time management

Statement	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I like to be given strict deadlines for each task. It helps me stay organised and on track.					
I would rather be 15 minutes early than one minute late.					
I like to improvise instead of planning everything out ahead of time.					
I prefer to be able to manage when and how I do each task.					
I have a difficult time estimating how long a task will take.					
I have more motivation when there is an upcoming deadline. It helps me focus.					
I have difficulty keeping priorities in the most beneficial order.					

When you have finished, consider what your answers mean in regard to potential strengths and/or challenges for you when it comes to time management in university. If you are a person who likes strict deadlines, what would you do if you took a course that only had one large paper due at the end? Would you set yourself a series of mini deadlines that made you more comfortable and that kept things moving along for you? Or, if you have difficulty prioritising tasks, would it help you to make a list of the tasks to do and order them, so you know which ones must be finished first?

Time Audit

The simplest way to manage your time is to plan accurately for how much time it will take to do each task, and then set aside that amount of time. How you divide the time is up to you. If it is going to take you five hours to study for a final exam, you can plan to spread it over five days, with an hour each night, or you can plan on two hours one night and three hours the next.

This approach however relies on being able to estimate time accurately. To get organised and plan for the semester ahead, you will need to consider study and non-study commitments. Conduct an audit on how much time you spend on aspects of your daily life, include studying, working, sleeping, eating, caring for others, socialising, household chores and exercising. This will allow you to see where your time is going and where you could achieve some better balance for your life, work and study.

In this activity, write down all the things you think you will do tomorrow, and estimate the time you will spend doing each (see Table 6). Then track each thing you have written down to see how accurate your estimates were. After you have completed this activity for a single day, you may consider completing another time audit for an entire week so that you are certain to include all of your activities.

Table 6. Sample time estimate table

Daily activity	Estimate time	Actual time
Practice quiz	5 minutes	15 minutes
Lab conclusions	20 minutes	35 minutes
Food shopping	45 minutes	30 minutes
Drive to work	20 minutes	20 minutes
Work	4 hours	4 hours
Physical therapy	1 hour	50 minutes

Plan your Semester

Now that you have audited your time and you know how much time is required in all areas of your life you can now make a plan. It is important to view your time in three different ways

- semester plan
- weekly plan
- daily plan

Semester Plan

- Make a plan of the whole semester.
- Write in assignment due dates and exam blocks
- Write in class or lab attendance requirements
- Include other significant commitments, for example, work or family commitments

Weekly Plan

- Consider the tasks you need to complete each week
- Include all the expectations of your course such as weekly readings or tutorial preparation.
- Allocate time for exam preparation, tutorial preparation and time to work on upcoming assignments.

Daily Plan

- Write daily 'to do' lists
- Use time management apps on your phone to set reminders
- Allow for some flexibility

Breaking Tasks Down

Predicting how long a task will take is usually the most difficult part of time management. It is challenging to estimate accurately time spent on-task and to also account for interruptions or unforeseen problems that cause delays. When it comes to academic activities, many tasks can be dependent upon the completion of other things first, or the time a task takes can vary from one instance to another. For example, if a lecturer assigned you three chapters of reading, you would not know how long each chapter might take to read until you looked at them. The first chapter might be 30 pages long while the second is 45. The third chapter could be only 20 pages but made up mostly of charts and graphs for you to compare. By page count, it might seem that the third chapter would take the least amount of time, but actually studying charts and graphs to gather information can take longer than regular reading.

The next strategy discussed, is to break tasks into smaller, more manageable units that do not require as much time to complete. As an example, imagine you are assigned a two-page essay that is to include references. You estimate that to complete the essay would take you between four and five hours. You look at your calendar over the next week and see that there are no open five-hour blocks. While looking at your calendar, you do see that you can squeeze in an hour every night. Instead of trying to write the entire paper in one sitting, you break it up into much smaller components as shown in the table below (see Table 7).

Table 7. Breaking down projects into even small chunks.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.		Work		Work			Work
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Algebra	Work	Algebra	Work	Algebra	10 a.m. – 11 a.m. only if needed	Work
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Lunch/study	1pm English comp	Lunch/study	1pm English comp	Lunch/study	Family picnic	
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	History	English comp	History	English comp	History	Family picnic	
4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.	Study for algebra quiz	Grocery	Study for history exam	Study for history exam	Research 5 p.m. -6 p.m. Rewrite and polish final draft	Family picnic	Laundry
6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.	Write outline: look for references	Research references to support outline; look for good quotes	Research presentation project	Write second page and closing draft	Create presentation	Meet with Darcy	Prepare university stuff for next week
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	Free time	Free time	Write paper introduction and first page draft	Research presentation project	Create presentation		Free time

Or you could use a variation of the Pomodoro Technique discussed in the next section and write for three 20-minute segments each day at different times. The key is to look for ways to break down the entire task into smaller steps and spread them out to fit your schedule.

Three Strategies for Time Management



Figure 26. The Pomodoro Technique is named after a type of kitchen timer, but you can use any clock or countdown timer. Image by Marco Verch used under [CC BY 2.0 licence](#)

Here are three time management strategies that you can try:

- Daily Top Three,
- Pomodoro Technique, and
- Eat the Frog.

Daily Top Three

For the *daily top three* strategy, decide which three things are the most important to finish that day, and these become the tasks that you complete. It is a very simple technique that is effective because each day you are finishing tasks and removing them from your list. Even if you took one day off a week and completed no tasks on that particular day, a *daily top three* strategy would have you finishing 18 tasks in the course of a single week. That is a good number of things crossed off your list.

Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro Technique allows you to tackle one task at a time with high intensity before taking a short-timed break, and then repeating this process. The Pomodoro Technique recommends 25 minutes of work and then a five-minute break, and after two hours of this, a longer break of 15-30 minutes (Cirillo, n.d). Be flexible in your approach, for example you don't have to stop after 25 minutes if you are working

well, or you may restart your 25 minutes if you get distracted. To make the most of this technique, plan your tasks ahead of time and be specific about what you want to achieve during each time block.

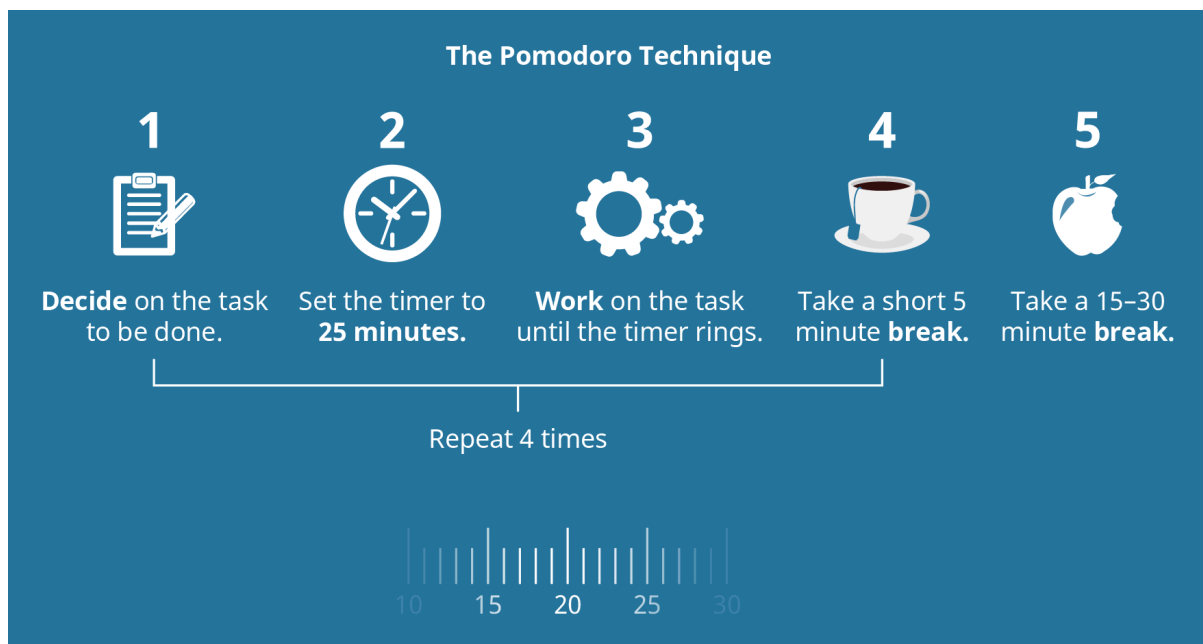


Figure 27. The Pomodoro Technique contains five defined steps. Image by OpenStax used under CC-BY 4.0 licence

Eat the Frog

The *Eat the Frog* strategy comes from a quote attributed to Mark Twain: “Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.” In time management this is based on the concept that if a person takes care of the biggest or most unpleasant task first, everything else will be easier after that.

We underestimate how much worry can impact our performance. If you are continually distracted by anxiety over a task you are dreading, it can affect the task you are working on at the time. When the task you are concerned with is finished, you will have a sense of accomplishment and relief, and other tasks will seem lighter and not as difficult.

Conclusion

Managing your time effectively while you are studying at university can mean the difference between success and failure. By managing your time and using some positive strategies, you can give yourself the best possible chance of successful study outcomes.

Key points

- Time management at university level is up to you.
- Expect to spend more time on learning outside of the classroom than you will inside the classroom.
- Identify your time management style to help you create deadlines.
- Consider study and non-study commitments when auditing your time to help you to see where your time goes.
- Plan your semester first, add weekly tasks, and then make a 'to do' list for daily tasks.
- Break large tasks into small blocks of time which will fit into your schedule.
- Use the Daily Top Three to write down three tasks that are important to finish that day.
- Use the Pomodoro Technique to work on one task for a 25-minute period. then take a five-minute break then repeat until you have been working for two hours.
- Use *Eat the Frog* to take care of the biggest task first so that everything else seems easier after that.

References

Cirillo, F. (n.d). *The Pomodoro Technique*. Cirillo Consulting. <https://francescocirillo.com/pages/pomodoro-technique>

COMBATTING PROCRASTINATION

Colleen Kaesehagen



Figure 28. It's easy to lose time when you procrastinate. Image by CottonBro used under CC0 licence

Introduction

Let's begin with a few questions. *Would you like to be successful at university? Do you ever avoid work or delay doing difficult jobs? Would you like to stop procrastinating and prevent its negative consequences?* If you answered yes to any of these questions, then this chapter can help you. Procrastination is common at university. Students tend to procrastinate if a set task seems too challenging or stressful to tackle. Therefore, it is helpful to consider both why you procrastinate and what can you do about it. In this chapter you will learn about what procrastination is, why it exists, its effects, and helpful strategies to combat it. Understanding these elements can help keep you on the path to academic success.

What is Procrastination?

Procrastination is the act of delaying tasks that need to be completed at a certain time. We all do to it to some extent. For most people, minor procrastination is not a great concern. There are however, situations where procrastination can become a serious problem and hinder academic success. For example, consistently deferring your revision to the night before the exam or leaving your assignments until the due day can threaten your success. The risks of causing anxiety, poor performance and loss of self-esteem

amplify when it becomes a chronic habit affecting multiple subjects. If procrastinating is so destructive, then why do we do it?

Reasons for Procrastinating

There are several reasons why we procrastinate, and some are surprising. We may delay a task because we think we don't need to do it yet, because other tasks seem more important, or because we simply want to avoid the strain of a challenge. If you look a little deeper, however, you may find you have hidden physical or psychological motives driving your choices.

Lack of energy and focus



Figure 29. Lack of mental focus is another reason we avoid tasks. Image by Ketut Subiyanto used under CCO licence

Sometimes we just do not feel up to the challenge of a certain task. It might be due to discomfort, illness, or just a lack of energy. If this is the case, it is important to identify the cause. It could be something as simple as a lack of sleep, having an unhealthy diet or tiredness after working constantly all day. If a lack of energy is continually causing you to procrastinate to the point where you are beginning to feel stressed over not getting things done, it's time to assess the situation and find the remedy. It may be as simple as improving your diet, reducing your work shifts or heading off to bed earlier instead of playing games into the early hours of the morning.

A lack of mental focus can be another reason we avoid tasks. This can be due to mental fatigue, being disorganised, or being distracted by other things. If we allow our attention to be constantly diverted by phone calls, friends, family members gaming, watching a show or social media notifications, it can hinder our progress in meeting goals on time. Lack of mental focus is something that may effects your life going beyond simply avoiding tasks. If it is something that reoccurs and seems difficult to rectify, you may find it helpful to seek professional support.

Fear of failure

A fear of failure is a hidden cause of procrastination. Sometimes even without awareness, we can be afraid that we will not be able to do a task well. Failing may make us feel incompetent or embarrassed, so we secretly find ways to sabotage doing a task. We trick ourselves into thinking that if we don't do the work, then we won't get those feelings of failure of not being clever enough. Then we can rationalise that we failed because we ran out of time to complete the task, not because we were incapable.

A fear of failure may not have anything to do with the actual ability of the person suffering from it. You can in fact be quite capable of doing a task and performing well, but fear holds you back from trying. Viewing ourselves in a negative manner can directly impact our self-confidence, building more fear and more avoidance (Nicholson & Scharff, 2007). One way to break this destructive cycle is to realise that not everyone does everything perfectly the first time. Failure can be a valuable learning experience that helps us improve and develop. It provides useful information about what we need to change in order to succeed. By changing our mindset about failure, you can disarm its power as an excuse to avoid tasks.

The Effects of Procrastinating

The effects of procrastinating can be detrimental to your academic success. Many are obvious and understood easily, but some are more subtle. If you can identify the effects, it can help you to recognise when procrastinating is interfering with your study. You can increase your self-awareness about your behaviour by discussing what you are noticing with friends (Nicholson & Scharff, 2007), family, or with the support services available at your university.

Loss of time



Figure 30. Procrastination diverts from important tasks. Image by Cottonbro Studio used under CC BY 4.0 licence

Procrastination diverts time away from important or necessary tasks, and spends it on less important

activities. The end result is you have less time to do what is really important. With less time to complete assessment tasks, the accuracy of your work and quality of the content are likely to suffer. The result can be poor academic performance (Van Eerde, 2003). Time is a precious gift that cannot be refunded. Once it is spent, it is gone forever. Procrastinating risks trading this valuable commodity for things that do not ultimately support your goal of graduating from university. Students who don't address their habit of procrastinating, may regret their actions.

Loss of achieving goals

Another adverse effect of procrastination is its impact on achieving academic goals. Some long-term goals can only be reached if short-term goals are achieved first. For example, you may have to pass a subject on child safety and wellbeing before you are permitted to go on a practical placement. Failing to complete a task can be a sign of procrastination. The *effect* of not completing it is missing out on reaching a goal and every other goal that depends on it. Without the focus of goals and the satisfaction of achieving them, it can be easy to lose direction and motivation.

Loss of self-esteem

Often, when you procrastinate, you can become frustrated and disappointed in yourself for not getting important tasks completed. If this continues to happen, you can begin to develop an inferior opinion of yourself and might question your abilities. It can lead to low self-esteem and might even begin to feel like there is something wrong with you. This can trigger other increasingly negative emotional experiences such as anger and depression. Low self-esteem can be both the cause and the effect of procrastinating. It can produce a damaging cycle. Increasing our self-esteem can help us to interrupt the pattern and reduce our fears of failure (Langher et al., 2017), leading to more positive outcomes.

Stress

Procrastination causes stress and anxiety, which may seem odd since the act of procrastination is often about avoiding a task we think is stressful! Anyone who has noticed that nagging feeling when they know there is something else they should be doing is familiar with this. On the other hand, some students see this kind of stress as a boost of mental urgency. They put off a task until they feel that surge of motivation. While this may have worked in the past, students quickly learn that procrastinating when it comes to university work almost always includes an underestimation of the tasks to be completed— sometimes with disastrous results. Stress not only affects an individual's health and wellbeing, but it can also have a negative effect on academic accomplishment. Procrastination might sometimes help us to release stress for a short period of time, but intentional avoidance can trigger even more stress, anxiety and guilt later.

Strategies for Combatting Procrastination

Now that you understand a few of the major problems procrastination can produce, let's look at methods to manage it and get you on to completing the tasks, no matter how unpleasant you think they might be.

Get organised

The most effective way to combat procrastination is to use time management strategies such as schedules, goal setting, and other techniques to get tasks accomplished in a timely manner. In order to be more organised, you need to clarify what needs to be done, how it can be done, and when you can complete it. Contemplating these questions will assist you to manage your time appropriately by helping you to be more focused and organised. Essentially, we need to monitor our progress frequently, ensuring that we improve our approaches by figuring out which strategies work best for us.

Put aside distractions

Distractions are time-killers and are the primary way people procrastinate. It is too easy to just play a video game a little while longer, check out social media, or finish watching a movie when we are avoiding a task. Putting aside distractions is one of the primary functions of setting priorities. It is important to exercise self-discipline, so that we can focus our attention on one thing. Additionally, we can develop good study habits by delaying short term pleasure and by paying more attention to completing those tasks that are more significant.

Reward yourself



Figure 31. A strong motivational tool is to hold ourselves accountable by telling someone else we are going to do something and when we are going to do it. Image by Armin Rimoldi used under CC0 licence

Rewarding yourself for the completion of tasks or meeting goals is a good way to fight procrastination. An example of this would be rewarding yourself with watching a movie you would enjoy *after* you have finished the things you need to do, rather than using the movie to keep yourself from getting things done. Completing a task successfully and getting the feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment can be considered a reward in itself. Since you have invested a lot of effort for a good purpose and you have sacrificed your comfort, you can reward yourself. This can not only motivate you, but also enhance your self-efficacy beliefs in undertaking other tasks confidently in the future.

Be accountable—tell someone else

A strong motivational tool is to hold ourselves accountable by telling someone else we are going to do something and when we are going to do it. This may not seem like it would be very effective, but on a psychological level we feel more compelled to do something if we tell someone else. This can help us stay on task and avoid procrastination—especially if we take our accountability to another person seriously enough to warrant contacting that person and apologising for not doing what we said we were going to do.

Conclusion

Procrastination is a common experience among university students. The results are often detrimental to academic achievement, produce stress and raise anxiety. This chapter examined the nature of procrastination, why we do it, how it affects us, and how to fight it. Be on the lookout for signs of procrastination and combat it actively when you see it. If you do, you can reap the benefits of having less stress, higher self-esteem and greater achievement during your academic journey.

Key points

- Procrastination is the act of delaying tasks that need to be completed by a certain time.
 - Reasons for procrastinating include a lack of energy and focus, and a fear of failure.
 - The effects of procrastination include a loss of time, goals, self-esteem and/or increase stress.
 - Develop good study habits by being organised, putting aside distractions, rewarding yourself and remaining accountable.
-

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PART C: SUCCESSFUL STUDY SKILLS



Successful Study Skills

INTEGRITY AT UNIVERSITY

Rhian Morgan



Figure 32. Accurately recording your information sources will help you to achieve academic integrity.
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Introduction

You will probably encounter the term “academic integrity” frequently while you are a student. Understanding and applying academic integrity is essential for success at university. This chapter will explain the essence of academic integrity. It will then focus on referencing, as referencing is a key skill that demonstrates academic integrity. This will be followed by a discussion of threats to your academic integrity and actions you can take to support and demonstrate integrity.

What is Academic Integrity?

“Academic integrity means acting with the values of honesty, trust, fairness,

respect and responsibility in learning, teaching and research” (Exemplary Academic Integrity Project, 2013).

Academic integrity is honest, respectful, and ethical behaviour within the university environment. Examples include using references to show where the information you are using comes from and ensuring all the work you submit is your own original content.



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Acknowledging your Sources



Figure 33. Academic integrity is demonstrated when you accurately attribute ideas, direct and indirect quotes, images, and other information to the correct source. Image by USQ used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

When you refer to someone else’s ideas, work, or data within your assignments, you need to acknowledge the original source by using references. Referencing:

- Demonstrates academic integrity;
- Allows you to provide evidence to support your ideas;
- Shows that your work is based on reliable information; and
- Allows others to verify the information you have provided.

There are two main types of references that should be included in your work:

- **In-text citations** should be provided throughout your work; and
- A **reference list** with details of the sources you have used should be added at the end of your work.

For example, when using an author-date referencing style, in-text citations are often provided in brackets at the end of the sentence, e.g. *Digital literacy skills allow students to take advantage of flexible and distance learning opportunities* (Yang, Catterall & Davis, 2013). The authors' names and the date of the work cited may also be written as part of the sentence, e.g. *Yang, Catterall, and Davis (2013) argued that digital literacy skills allow students to take advantage of flexible and distance learning opportunities*. The reference list at the end of the assignment would then list the full bibliographic details of the works you have cited in alphabetical order.

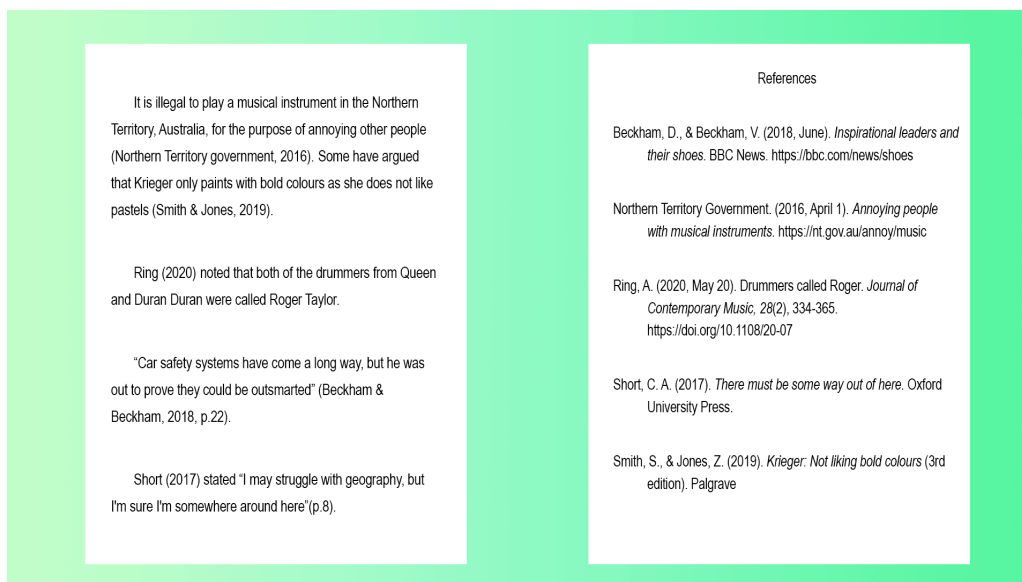


Figure 34. In-text citations and references in APA style demonstrate academic integrity. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

There are lots of different referencing styles and your subject outline will provide guidance on the style you should be using in your assignments. The JCU Library's Referencing Guide will help you work out how to use each referencing style correctly.

When do I have to Reference?

You need to provide references whenever you use someone else's work, ideas, words, content, or data. Anything that is not your own original content needs to be referenced. This includes **direct quotes**, where you have used the exact wording provided in the original source. Direct quotes also need to be placed in **quotation marks**, e.g. *Algorithmic logics "organize the space and flow of interaction"* (Caliandro, 2018, p. 557). You also need to reference any content that you have **paraphrased** (put into your own words) or

summarised, e.g. *Social networks are complex assemblages of users, algorithms, and data* (Pearce, 2018). It is also important to reference any **images, media, statistics, or graphs** that you use in your work.

Using correct referencing will help demonstrate academic integrity, but it is not the only behaviour to consider. There are some behaviours that you should avoid. Threats to your academic integrity include plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and collusion (TEQSA, 2019, p. 3).

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the accidental or deliberate use of other people's work without sufficient attribution. In effect, you are claiming someone else's work as your own. Accidental plagiarism can be avoided by using effective notetaking practices (see the chapter Notetaking). Notetaking will ensure you have the details needed to accurately report and attribute the resources you use. Paraphrasing – or rewriting the original ideas in your own words – is also required. Paraphrasing allows you to focus on aspects of an original work that support your arguments and to synthesise from multiple sources of information (APA, 2019). See the chapter Writing Assignments for more on paraphrasing.

Self-plagiarism

Self-plagiarism is the re-use of your own work in a subsequent assignment. At first glance, this may appear to be an efficient use of your time and effort. However, self-plagiarism does not demonstrate that you have learned anything new. Likewise, self-plagiarism does not show that you have achieved the expected outcomes of your course. You can use the same sources of information, but to avoid self-plagiarism you will need to write a new assignment to address the new topic, question, or perspective.

Collusion

Collusion occurs when a student works with others – students, friends, paid tutors, family members – and then submits that shared work as if it is their own original work (Crook & Nixon, 2018).



Figure 35. Working with others can be a productive and enjoyable way to learn.
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Working with others and discussing the content of a course or the requirements of an assignment can be productive, helpful, and enjoyable. However, the final submission for an individual piece of assessment must be your own. This does not mean that you cannot work with your peers, discuss subject material, study together, or help each other with proof-reading, but you must not:

- Provide work for another student to submit as part of their own assignment;
- Use other students' content in your own assignment;
- Co-write individual assessment items; or
- Provide others with answers to quizzes, essay topics, or tests.

Setting clear expectations regarding peer-feedback and making sure you understand the requirements of your assessment tasks can help you avoid collusion. The university provides resources to help you with your academic integrity. These resources include the referencing guide, writing guide, and assignment writing resources. You will also have the opportunity to check drafts of your work using the university's text matching program, SafeAssign.

SafeAssign



Figure 36. Text matching software can help you avoid plagiarism. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

SafeAssign is a text matching program that is linked to assessment submission boxes in LearnJCU. This tool searches the internet and university assessment repositories to find any text in your assignment that matches with other sources, including websites, scholarly literature, and other student assignments. You will often have the opportunity to submit a draft assignment to SafeAssign before you submit your final assignment. Use of this software will generate a report and alert you to any text matches. This will allow you to use your referencing and paraphrasing skills to correctly attribute all the ideas in your work, make sure all your quotes are in quotation marks, and avoid plagiarism.

Conclusion

Academic integrity governs all that you do at university. Academic integrity is made visible by the accurate attribution of ideas, images, or other information you use in your work according to the rules of your university's preferred referencing style. It is also important to only submit your own original work for assessment, or to clarify the contributions of others where relevant. When reading your work, your lecturer should be able to identify the ideas that you used to support your thinking and be confident that anything else is your personal contribution. Being diligent with referencing, and only submitting work that is your own, are two clear ways to act with academic integrity.

Key points

- Academic integrity requires the honest, respectful, and ethical use of information.
- Cite and reference all your information sources as described by your university

referencing guides.

- Provide a citation every time you use someone else's ideas, words, diagrams, audio, or other information.
- When sharing work with peers, provide clear instructions regarding the feedback you are seeking.
- Plagiarism and collusion undermines the value of your degree and leaves you vulnerable to academic penalties.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOUNDATIONS

Lyle Cleeland and Lisa Moody



Figure 37. Every institution and every course in Australia has its own English entry level requirements. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

Welcome to the English Language Foundations chapter. Here, we are going to discover some of the academic English foundational skills required for study at university.

Academic English

Academic English is the particular style of English that is used at the university level. It is important to note that every person who enters university studies for the first time will need the time to learn and develop their understanding of what Academic English is, and how they can apply it to their own writing. This cannot be rushed. You may seem to take longer than other people and that is okay. In the sections below, you will see what some of the basics of academic writing are and you will see some key rules and

explanations of Academic English. Next you will learn and review some of the basic grammatical structures of academic writing.

It is normal for academic writing to seem a little daunting to new students. It can feel like you are learning a whole new language. Fortunately, there are many great support services available to support you at university as you develop your academic literacy. By following a few guidelines, you will also be well on your way to communicating effectively in the academic context. At the end of this chapter, you will find links to additional supports available to you at JCU.

All good writing is the result of a focused editing and revision process. Even the best writers start with very rough drafts. There are some general guidelines to be aware of and follow when drafting. Let's look at some basic do's and don'ts of academic writing:

Do's

Write clearly and concisely

- It is important to write clearly and simply, which also helps you to stick to the word count.
- For example: it is better to say, "the research data" rather than "the data from the research".
- Your first few drafts might feel like a mess, but editing will clarify your thoughts and make the sentences simpler.

Reference your research and information

- Referencing is a way to acknowledge the expert sources you have engaged with. Referencing also lends credibility to your work because it proves you have read the work of experts in the field.
- At JCU a common referencing style is APA 7.
- For more information on referencing, check out the next chapter on Working with Information.

Write in third person

- Writing in third person means not referring to yourself. For example, you avoid saying "in my opinion" or "in this essay I will".
- The accepted form is to name other researchers/professors/academics by their surname (in the appropriate referencing system) to support what you are saying. For example,

“Smith (2020) believes that...” rather than to say “I believe that...”.

- Please note, however, that first person is sometimes acceptable for some assignments, especially when you are asked to *reflect*. You can read more about reflective writing in the Writing Assignments chapter.

Plan your writing

- Planning is an important early step before you start writing and can help you to focus and answer all parts of the assignment question.
- For a new student, writing an essay may take up to eight weeks – 3 weeks reading and research, 2 weeks planning and reviewing, 3 weeks writing and editing.
- Check out the [Writing Assignments chapter](#) in this book for more information.

Do Not's

Use slang words or informal spoken terms (colloquialisms)

The use of informal spoken terms or slang indicates a degree of familiarity or a friendly relationship to a subject. Because the aim of academic writing is to demonstrate evidence-based, research-informed arguments, we work to avoid seeming too casual or familiar with our reader. We want to sound knowledgeable and rational.

Academic writing is considered formal, so slang and informal spoken terms should be avoided.

- For example, avoid saying, “Managing climate change is easier said than done” because ‘easier said than done’ is a common speech like phrase. It would be better to write, “Managing climate change can be difficult in practice”. This example is more formal and academic, and therefore more appropriate for academic writing.

Note: formal language is not simply complex sentences with big words.

Write sentences that are too long or too short

- Long sentences with more than one key idea are difficult for the reader to follow.
- Sentences that are too short can sound ‘choppy’ or disjointed.
- Try to keep your sentences roughly between 15-25 words or about 2 lines long.
- You can also have sentences that are longer and shorter than this – a variety is

something to aim for.

Use contractions

- Contractions are when we use an apostrophe to shorten two words together as one word. For example, 'do not' becomes 'don't'. You should always use the full words.
- For example, do not write, "It doesn't seem accurate to label the author's words as exceptional". This is too much like a spoken phrase. Instead you should write, "It does not seem accurate to label the author's words as exceptional".

Be overly emotive in your language

- Academic writing is often described as being non-personal or 'objective', which means that it relies on evidence-based research to support arguments, not personal feeling or opinion.
- The opposite of objective is subjective, which relies on emotions to support a position, and is therefore considered less effective. Therefore, it is important to avoid emotive ways of backing up your arguments, as they are not considered as reliable as evidence from good quality research.
- For example, avoid using a sentence like "It is terrible that governments deny climate change, and are destroying the world our children will inherit". Instead, it would be better to say, "Decades of research demonstrate that global warming is occurring and will have significant consequences for the environment in the future".

Grammar for academic writing

Review of parts of speech

Parts of speech are what we call the different words that make up a full sentence. It can be useful to familiarise yourself with the parts of speech in a sentence so that you can recognise where the different parts of speech normally go in a sentence. This can also help you understand where you may need to make improvements in your own writing. Here are some of the most common parts of speech:

Table 8. Parts of speech

Part of speech	Explanation/examples
Noun	A noun is the name of a person/place or thing. e.g. Australia, tree, internet, climate change
Pronoun	Pronouns replace the name of a noun with something else. e.g. It, he, she, they, that
Verb	A verb is a 'doing' word in a sentence. e.g. Examine, explain, write, is, suggest
Adjective	An adjective is a describing word and is used to describe nouns. e.g. vibrant, big, small, credible, extensive, limited
Adverb	An adverb is a describing word used to describe verbs. They often end in 'ly'. e.g. confidently, quickly, smoothly, slowly, knowingly
Preposition	Prepositions show the relationship between nouns or noun phrases. e.g. on, at, in, over, into, through, from, of, with
Article	Articles refer to particular nouns and/or modify the noun. There are only three articles in English: e.g. a/an/the
Conjunction	Conjunctions are important words that help to link words or phrases together in a sentence. e.g. and, however, but, because, since, also

Word order in sentences

Active sentences are constructed with a *subject*, then a *verb*, then an *object* (**S-V-O**).

- The subject is the actor of the sentence.
- The verb is the action that is done.
- The object is the thing that the action was done to.

This is the most common word order in English. It is preferred for general academic writing.

For example *John (subject) kicked (verb) the ball (object)*.

Passive sentences reverse this and put the object first (**O-V-S**).

For example *The ball (object) was kicked (verb) by John (subject)*.

Sentence structures

There are four main types of sentence structure in English, each described below. By having a variety of sentence structures in your writing, you can assist the clear and simple expression of ideas and allow the reader to understand your argument.

Simple sentences

Simple sentences only require one subject (a noun or noun phrase), and a ‘predicate’ which is the information about the subject and contains the verb (or verb phrase).

The research is completed.

‘The research’ = the noun

‘is completed’ = the predicate

Compound sentences

Compound sentences are made up of at least two *independent clauses*. Independent clauses are parts of a sentence that have at least a subject and a verb (and are complete ideas). The independent clauses **must** be joined with a conjunction: *for, and, or, nor, but, yet, so*. For example:

The research is completed, and the assignment is finished.

‘The research is completed’ = independent clause one

‘and’ = conjunction

‘the assignment is finished’ = independent clause two

Complex sentences

Complex sentences are made up of at least one *independent clause* and one *dependent clause* (which does not make sense on its own). A dependent clause also contains a subject and a verb, but it relies on the other information in a sentence for it to make sense. Complex sentences can be joined together by any other conjunction not listed above for compound sentences. For example:

I completed the research which was difficult.

‘I completed the research’ = independent clause

'which'	=	conjunction
'was difficult'	=	dependent clause

In this example, you can see that the dependent clause relies on the information in the independent clause for it to make sense.

Compound-complex sentences

Finally, compound-complex sentences are a combination of compound and complex sentences. These sentences can be useful for conveying complex ideas and information. For example:

I completed the research which was difficult, but I still managed to submit my assignment on time.

'I completed the research which was difficult' = complex sentence clause

'but' = conjunction

'I still managed to submit my assignments on time' = independent clause

Activity: Independent and Dependent Clauses

Look at the three sentences below. Each sentence has been broken up into two phrases (independent and dependent clauses). Drag and drop the clauses into the correct field.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=67#h5p-4>

Punctuation rules

Using punctuation correctly is essential to success at university. Knowing the rules about how to use punctuation marks correctly can not only improve the logic and flow of your sentences, but also can

improve the quality of your writing. Take a look at the table below which outlines the main punctuation marks used in academic writing and consider the explanation and examples.

Table 9. Punctuation rules

Punctuation mark	Explanation of use	Example of use
. Full stop	To show the end of a sentence. Usually one or two spaces is required on the keyboard before starting a new sentence, but check your formatting and referencing requirements.	I went to university today.
, comma	Commas show pauses between ideas in sentences and also help to break up clauses in a sentence.	1. Today I studied chemistry, went to work, and had my dinner. 2. Harry, a good friend of mine, came over on the weekend.
: colon	A colon is used before listing a series of ideas that are related to the information that was presented before the colon.	There are three main parts to an essay: an introduction, body, and conclusion.
; semi-colon	A semi-colon helps to join together two independent clauses within a sentence. Think of it as a longer pause than a comma, but not quite a full stop as the ideas in the sentence are related to each other.	I finished my assignment on the weekend; now I can relax and watch Netflix.
— Em dash	Em dashes have a variety of functions in a sentence. In academic writing, you may see them used to emphasise elements within a list, or to show a change of thought or idea within a sentence.	1. Students, admin staff, professors, researchers — these are all types of people you will meet on campus. 2. Many students believe it is a difficult assignment — I hope the professor covers it in the next class.
... ellipsis	Ellipsis in academic writing usually shows the reader where there is information from a source that is taken out from the original.	“One of the most significant reasons why we procrastinate...is a lack of planning.”
() parentheses	Parentheses, also known commonly as ‘round brackets’, show additional information in a sentence. They are also used in many referencing systems as well to credit authors within a paper.	1. I enjoy my physics class the best (not chemistry) because the teacher is so engaging. 2. Significant research (Smith, 2020; Jones, 2014) demonstrates that...
[] brackets	Brackets, also known as ‘square brackets’, are used in academic writing to show additional information within a quote that was not from the original source.	“It is commonly referred to [in Australia] as the tyranny of distance.”

Correct usage of the apostrophe

Many people that are unfamiliar with Academic English misuse the apostrophe. The correct ways to use the apostrophe are:

1. To show where letters are missing: can't – "cannot", don't – "do not".
2. To show possession of something: Lisa's house, Townsville's greatest criminal, the moon's shadow, Julia's ideas.
3. In irregular constructions that do not have a plural form – the 60's – "the sixties", if's – "a lot of if's and but's", b's – "How many b's in bubblegum?"
4. To show plural possession – "the jewelers' convention is in town".

Common mistakes:

1. *Do not use* apostrophes to show pluralisation in regular words: "I will buy the coffee's"
2. *Do not use* apostrophes to show possession in pronouns: "Is this your's?", "What is it's importance?"

Transition words

Transition words show when your ideas are moving to a new or slightly different point. They help link ideas together between sentences and between your paragraphs. They improve coherence and cohesion in your writing. Look at the image below to learn how different transition words are used.

Take a look at this academic phrase bank from the University of Manchester for some extra ideas of words and phrases that you could use in assignments.

Table 10. Transition words and phrases

For continuing an idea	For providing a contrast view	For showing cause and effect	For showing sequence	For concluding	For restating a point or giving an example
Additionally...			The first [concept/aspect]...		
In addition...	In contrast to these...		The second		
Moreover...	Unlike the	Following...	[concept/aspect]...	Therefore...	In other words...
Because...	previous	In response to...	The third [concept/aspect]...	This...	Specifically...
Consequently...	example...	Therefore...		Hence...	For instance...
Clearly, then...	Different from this...	As a result of...	Firstly, Secondly,	In final analysis...	One such occurrence...
Furthermore...		For this reason...	Finally...	In conclusion...	This is demonstrated by...
In the same way...	Despite these findings...	Thus...	After...Afterwards...		To illustrate...
Continuing this idea...	Contrary to these findings...	Due to this...	As soon as...	In final consideration...	Also...
Also...		Consequently...	In the first place...		To demonstrate...
Pursuing this further...	In opposition to... Nevertheless...	The reaction...	In the meantime...	Indeed	This is supported by...
			Later...		
			Meanwhile...		
			Next...		

Verb tenses

Verb tenses show time and duration in a sentence, for example past, present, future, or continuing. Look at the below table for how tenses are used in academic study.

Table 11. Tenses

Tense	Explanation	Example
Simple present tense	You use the simple present tense in writing when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stating your main points • giving an overview of your topic • giving the opinion of the writer you are referring to 	1. Smith (2009) states that... 2. The moon revolves around the earth. 3. It seems to be the right choice.
Simple past tense	You use the simple past tense to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give the findings of past research • recall something that happened in the past and the action is completed. 	1. The study revealed that, in 1998, 35% of children played violent video games. 2. He was a smoker in those days. 3. She went to the gym at seven every evening.
Present perfect tense	You use the present perfect tense: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to show that research in a certain area is still continuing. • when you write a general statement about past research. 	The present perfect tense is formed with have + past participle verb. 1. He has lived in Australia for two years. 2. The research has shown that... 3. Researchers have found that...

General tips for using tenses in academic writing:

- Using the past tense or the present tense is most common when writing academically.
- You should also use past tense to describe the results of a study, because the results are a result of past actions. For example, ‘the participants’ results **increased** after the intervention’.
- However, when you wish to discuss the implications of results and the possible conclusions that can be drawn from the evidence or research, it is best to use the present tense. For example, ‘these results **indicate** that...’

Subject-verb agreement

Plural (*more than one*) verbs need plural subjects, and singular (*only one*) verbs need singular subjects. Such as:

- Smith and Wesson (plural subject) **argue** (plural verb) that history is irrelevant.

- Smith (singular subject) **argues** (singular verb) that history is irrelevant.

Doing this incorrectly sounds wrong, and is natural to native speakers of English.

Subject-verb agreement with 'to be'

When you use the verb **to be** (e.g. am/is/are/was/were), remember to change the form according to the subject:

- I **am / was**
- you, we, they **are / were**
- she, he, it **is / was**

Checklist for assessing your grammar in academic writing

- Have you checked your sentences to ensure the subject and verb agree?
- Check your verbs in your sentences to ensure you have used the correct tense throughout your paper.
- Does your paper use some transition words to help your reader understand the ideas you are presenting?
- Does your paper have a good mix of simple, compound, and complex sentences?
- Have you checked the correct use of punctuation within your sentences?

Links to resources:

The JCU Learning Centre

The Purdue Online Writing Lab

Kahn Academy

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has explored the basic English language foundations that are required when commencing university level study.

Key points

- Each university and each degree has its own English language requirements.
- Academic English takes time to master and requires practice.
- Following some basic rules for writing in academic English can help enhance your writing.
- Reviewing key grammatical concepts – such as parts of speech, tenses, subject-verb agreement, and punctuation – can help you to improve your academic writing.

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<https://www.studiesinaustralia.com/Blog/about-australia/english-language-requirements-faqs>

READING

Gemma Lynch



Figure 38. Each of us reads and records information in our own way. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

In academic settings, we need to read critically and also need to read with an eye to distinguish fact from opinion and identify credible sources. This chapter will provide you with an understanding about the different ways of reading for university study, some reading strategies for you to try and information about different types of sources.

Ways of Reading

There are generally five ways of reading which include: 1) pre-reading, 2) skimming, 3) scanning, 4) detailed reading, and 5) critical reading.

Pre-reading

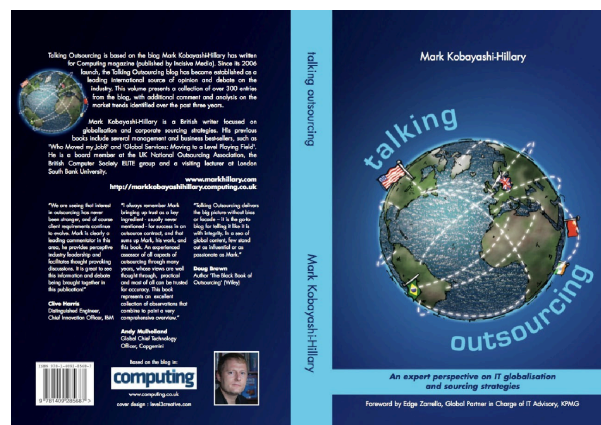


Figure 39. Learning about the book you're reading can provide good context and information. Look for an author's biography and forward on the back cover or in the first few pages. Image by Mark Hillary used under a CC-BY 2.0 licence

During the pre-reading stage, you can easily pick up on information from the cover and the front matter that may help you understand the material you're reading. Look for:

- Author name and details
- Topics covered
- Headings and subheadings
- Bolded text or excerpts
- Key terms or words
- Abstract or summary

Use these features as you read to help you determine what are the most important ideas.

Skimming

Skimming is not just glancing over the words on a page or screen. Effective skimming allows you to take in the major points of a passage to determine the usefulness of the source. If the source is useful, you will then need to engage in a deeper level of active reading, but skimming is the first step—not an alternative to deep reading. Skimming is useful as it gives you a brief overview before reading in more detail and assists with comprehension. Instead of reading every word, skimming involves spending a brief amount of time per page, quickly looking at:

- the contents
- the headings and sub-headings

- the abstract or introductory paragraph
- the conclusion
- any diagrams or graphics you think are important

End your skimming session with writing a few notes or terms to look up, questions you still have, and an overall summary. Recognise that you likely will return to that book or article for a more thorough reading if the material is useful.

Scanning

Scanning involves reading a text with a specific purpose in mind. Rather than reading every section, scanning involves quickly looking for relevant information only. Use this technique when you are reading to find specific material or data related to an assignment topic, or to find answers for questions (e.g. for tutorial activities).

Watch this Video for more information on Skimming and Scanning:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=115#oembed-1>

Detailed reading

Detailed reading is when you focus on the written material, really looking to gather specific information or evidence on a topic. This type of reading will provide you with a more in-depth understanding of the specific information, facts, positions and views on a topic. In detailed reading you may be looking for new information or a different perspective. Is this writer claiming a radical new definition for the topic or an entirely opposite way to consider the subject matter, connecting it to other topics or disciplines in ways you have never considered? Also, try to consider all the possible perspectives of a subject as well as the potential for misunderstanding due to personal biases and the availability of false information about the topic.

Critical reading

Critical reading requires you to actively engage with the written material by questioning and evaluating the quality and relevance of the information for your task. This may include analysing the author's strategies, methods and reasoning. Critical reading is a vital skill to develop to help you become a better analytical thinker and writer.

The following are some questions to consider when reading critically.

- What is the purpose of the text?
- What is the argument being developed?
- Is it logical?
- Is the text biased?
- Is there supporting evidence and how valid is it?
- Are there any underlying assumptions?
- Is there an alternative conclusion given?

When reading critically it is often useful to re-read the material, both for comprehension but also to get a deeper understanding. It is good to revisit texts after reading more, or after a few more lectures/tutorials and see how this text fits with what you now know. Does your evaluation change? Do you have a greater understanding? Does your position change on the topics present?

Allow Time for Reading



Figure 40. If you plan to make time for reading while you commute, remember that unexpected events like delays and cancellations could impact your concentration. Image by Nick Walker used under a [CCO licence](#)

You should determine the reading requirements and expectations for every class early in the semester. You also need to understand why you are reading the particular text you are assigned. Do you need to read closely for minute details that determine cause and effect? Or is your lecturer asking you to skim several sources so you become more familiar with the topic? Knowing this reasoning will help you decide your timing, what notes to take, and how best to undertake the reading assignment. To avoid feeling overwhelmed, schedule reading time when creating your weekly study timetable to allow you to time read and review.

Conclusion

Reading is one of the most important skills you need for studying at university. The strategies that have been explored in this chapter will help you to get the most out of your reading time.

Key points

- Pre-reading helps you understand the context of what you are reading.
- Skimming helps you to determine the usefulness of the source.
- Scan to find specific information related to your assignment topic.
- Detailed reading helps you to gather evidence on your topic.
- Use critical reading to question and evaluate the relevance of the information in the source
- Identify if you are reading a primary or secondary source, and watch for biases.
- Schedule weekly reading time.

THINKING

Gemma Lynch



Figure 41. Thinking is an important part of university study. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

Thinking and problem-solving are core skills that university educators aim to teach students. Learning different ways of thinking and how to resolve or respond to problems creates well-rounded learners that are capable of breaking down issues or problems into manageable parts, adapting to changing situations or contexts and devising creative or novel solutions. These are key characteristics required in the 21st century digitally focused work environment.

This chapter will provide you with an overview of different types of thinking, give guidance on how you can practise these approaches before then moving onto a discussion of problem-solving. Examples of the various forms of thinking discussed will be provided.

Creative Thinking

Creativity is needed in all occupations and during all stages of life. Learning to be more in tune with your own version of creativity can help you think more clearly, resolve problems, and appreciate setbacks. You're using creativity if you can explain complex biological concepts to your classmates in your tutorial or workshop. When creative thinking comes into play, you'll be looking for both original and unconventional ideas, and learning to recognise those ideas improves your thinking skills all around.

The 2001 revised Bloom's cognitive taxonomy, originally developed in 1948, placed a new word at the apex—*create*. That is the highest level of thinking skills. As this book shows, we do all need to use and develop the lower thinking skills that include remembering, applying, and analysing, but true intelligence and successful thinking move beyond these levels to invention.

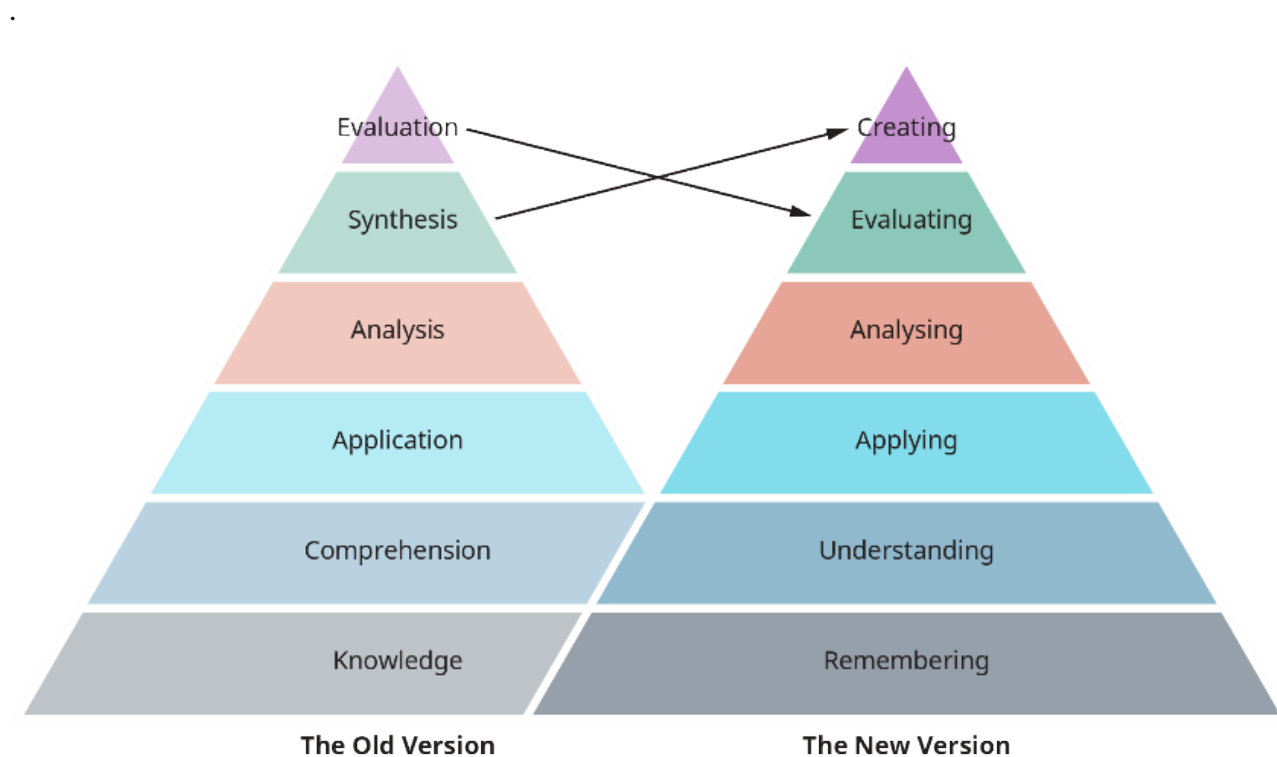


Figure 42. Bloom's Taxonomy is an important learning theory used by psychologists, cognitive scientists, and educators to demonstrate levels of thinking. Image by OpenStax used under CC-BY licence

Many assessments and lessons you've seen during your schooling have likely been arranged with Bloom's taxonomy in mind. Reciting a formula shows less comprehension than explaining the underlying concepts that make it work.

Analytical Thinking

When we work out a problem or situation systematically, breaking the whole into its component parts

for separate analysis, to come to a solution or a variety of possible solutions, we call that *analytical thinking*. Characteristics of analytical thinking include setting up the parts, using information literacy, and verifying the validity of any sources you reference. We do this sort of thinking in our everyday lives when we brainstorm, budget, detect patterns, plan, compare, work puzzles, and make decisions based on multiple sources of information. Think of all the thinking that goes into the logistics of a dinner-and-a-movie date—where to eat, what to watch, who to invite, what to wear, popcorn or ice-creams—when choices and decisions are rapid-fire, but we do it relatively successfully all the time.

Critical Thinking

The definitions vary slightly, but most agree that thinking critically includes some form of judgement that thinkers generate after careful analysis of the perspectives, opinions, or experimental results present in a particular problem or situation. Before you wonder if you're even capable of critical thinking, consider that you think critically every day. You are constantly weighing options, consulting data, gathering opinions, making choices, and then evaluating those decisions, which is a general definition of critical thinking.

Critical thinking forces you to determine the actual situation under question and to determine your thoughts and actions around that situation. Critical thinking differs according to the subject you're thinking about, and as such it can be difficult to pin down any sort of formula to make sure you are doing a good job of thinking critically in all situations. While you may need to adapt this list of critical thinking components, you can get started if you do the following:

- Question everything
- Conduct legitimate research
- Limit your assumptions
- Recognise your own biases
- Evaluate all perspectives

Additionally, you must recognise that changes will occur and may alter your conclusions now and in the future. You may eventually have to revisit an issue you effectively resolved previously and adapt to changing conditions. Knowing when to do that is another example of critical thinking. Informed flexibility or knowing that parts of the plan may need to change and how those changes can work into the overall goal, is also a recognised element of thinking critically.

Over time, attitudes, evidence, and opinions change, and as a critical thinker, you must continue to research, synthesise newly discovered evidence, and adapt to that new information. This is true of all fields of study, and critical thinkers are constantly learning and unlearning.



Figure 43. Information, attitudes, laws, and acceptance of smoking changed dramatically over time. More recently, vaping and related practices have rekindled debates and launched new research into safety. Image by Satish Krishnamurthy used under [CC-BY 2.0 licence](#)

Factual Arguments versus Opinions

Thinking and constructing analyses based on your thinking will bring you in contact with a great deal of information. Some of that information will be factual, and some will not be. You need to be able to distinguish between facts and opinions so you know how to support your arguments. Begin with basic definitions:

- **Fact:** a statement that is true and backed up with evidence; facts can be verified through observation or research
- **Opinion:** a statement someone holds to be true without supporting evidence; opinions express beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, or judgements

Of course, the tricky part is that most people do not label statements as fact and opinion, so you need to be aware and recognise the difference as you go about honing your critical thinking skills.

For example, *mice are animals* is a fact; *mice make the best pets* is an opinion. Many people become very attached to their opinions, even stating them as facts despite the lack of verifiable evidence. When you are reading, writing, and thinking critically, you must be on the lookout for sophisticated opinions others may present as factual information.

If you use biased and opinionated information or even incorrect facts as your evidence to support your factual arguments, then you have not validated your sources or checked your facts well enough. At this point, you would need to keep researching.

Problem Solving

Problem solving is part of our everyday life. We encounter problems in some form or the other daily. When solving a problem, we generally have a sequence of processes that we follow to effectively resolve or to dissolve a problem. In order to effectively problem solve, we may use some variation of the following strategies:

1. Identify and determine what the problem (issue) is
2. Explore (brainstorm) as many possible solutions to the problem
3. Recognise and understand that there will be varying perspectives from different people
4. Explore the results further by researching and documenting pros and cons for all the possible solutions
5. Select the best solution
6. Communicate your findings to all involved
7. Establish logical action items based on your analysis

The image below represents the problem-solving cycle:

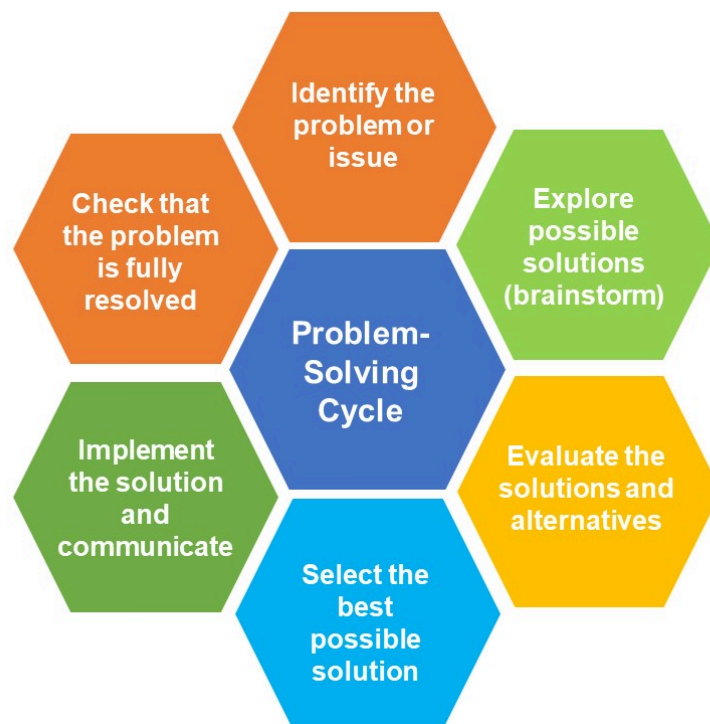


Figure 44. Problem-solving cycle. Image by James Cook University adapted from USQ used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

In order to determine the best solution to any problem, it is important for us to generate a wide array of solutions. When coming up with the solutions during a brainstorming session, it is important to remember

that there is no right or wrong answer. The purpose of this is to establish different solutions that can potentially solve the problem. Once you have a variety of different solutions, you can start evaluating them to see how they fit within the context of the problem and weighing up pros and cons. This will help you to narrow down your solutions until you find that one solution that will be deemed as the best. When you have established your best solution, you can then communicate the solution to all the parties who are involved within the problem and proceed to implementing the solution. Let the solution run and then evaluate whether the problem has been resolved or not. Evaluation is an important part for closing the loop when problem solving. If the problem is not resolved, then go through the process again.

Determining the best approach to any given problem and generating more than one possible solution to the problem constitutes the complicated process of problem-solving.

Faced with a problem-solving opportunity, you must assess the skills you will need to create solutions. Problem-solving can involve many different types of thinking. You may have to call on your creative, analytical, or critical thinking skills—or more frequently, a combination of several different types of thinking—to solve a problem satisfactorily. When you approach a situation, how can you decide what is the best type of thinking to employ? Sometimes the answer is obvious; if you are working a scientific challenge, you likely will use analytical thinking; if you are a design student considering the atmosphere of a home, you may need to tap into creative thinking skills; and if you are an early childhood education major outlining the logistics involved in establishing a summer day camp for children, you may need a combination of critical, analytical, and creative thinking to solve this challenge.

Key points

- Thinking and problem-solving skills are critical to learning both at university and during your career.
- Creative thinking is the highest form of thinking skills as outlined in *Bloom's revised taxonomy*. The creative process appears challenging, but simply put it requires the combination of existing ideas in new ways to create novel outcomes.
- Analytical thinking requires you to break down a problem, task or issue into its smallest parts and respond to each accordingly.
- Critical thinking involves careful assessment or judgment of the available information, assumptions and bias to develop an informed perspective.
- It is important to understand the difference between facts and opinions. Facts are truthful statements supported by evidence. Opinions are statements someone believes

to be true without evidence.

- Problem-solving is a critical skill developed at university and may require all the above forms of thinking to carry out. It focuses on devising solutions.

NOTETAKING

Gemma Lynch



Figure 45. Strong notes build on your prior knowledge of a subject, help you discuss trends or patterns present in the information, and direct you toward areas needing further research or reading. Image by RF_...studio used under CC0 licence

Introduction

Notetaking and reading are two compatible skill sets. Beyond providing a record of the information you are reading or hearing, notes help you make meaning out of unfamiliar content. Well-written notes help you organise your thoughts, enhance your memory, and participate in class discussion, and they prepare you to respond successfully in exams. This chapter will provide you with guidelines for understanding your purpose for taking notes, and steps for taking notes before, during and after class. Then, a summary of different notetaking strategies will be provided so that you can choose the best method for your learning style. Finally, you will discover ways to annotate your notes to enable quick reference, along with information about taking notes specifically for assignments.

Understanding Your Purpose for Learning

Knowing your course requirements and the intended purpose for your notes should impact the type of notes you take. For example, are you:

- taking lecture notes that will become the basis of exam study?
- taking notes while watching your classes online?
- taking notes from books or articles for an assignment?

There are no right or wrong ways to take notes, but it is important to find strategies that work for you and are efficient for your purpose.

Taking Notes from Classes

Whether you are attending classes on campus or are studying online, it is still important to take notes from your lectures. Notes help you keep up with the content each week which in turn helps you prepare for your exams. There are things you should consider before, during and after your lectures to assist with your notetaking.

Before the class

In some courses the weekly class content is available before the lecture as PowerPoint slides. This may make it tempting not to take notes, however these slides usually only have key points. Further details and explanations are given verbally in the class. A good tip is to print the PowerPoint slides before the lecture and use them as the basis for your note taking. If you select the three slides per page from the print options, it will give you room to take some notes. Come to lectures prepared by completing any set reading or tasks for that week. This will help you understand the content and more easily make decisions about what relevant notes to take.

During the class



Figure 46. Handwriting your notes has been proven to increase memory and retention. Image by [Fotografierende](#) used under [CC0 licence](#)

Take notes to actively engage in the process of learning. This will help with concentration. Handwriting your notes has been proven to increase memory and retention. Do not try to write down every word or you will miss important information. Keep your notes brief, use keywords, short sentences and meaningful abbreviations.

Key points are usually outlined at the beginning of the lecture, and repeated or summarised at the end. Listen for language cues emphasising important information including:

- numerical lists, e.g. “firstly..., secondly”, “there are three steps/stages...”
- phrases such as “on the other hand”, “in particular”, “remember/note/look out for”, “consequently”
- inclusion of examples or hypothetical situations
- emphasis of a particular point through tone of voice

If you do not understand the content, make a note or write a question and follow this up in your tutorial or discussion forum.

After the class

It is important that you re-read your notes as soon as possible after the class, when the content is still

fresh in your mind, and make any additions. Your learning preference will inform the review strategies you choose.

Notetaking Strategies

There are several different notetaking strategies. Regardless of your method, be sure to keep your notes organised, store notes from the same subject together in one place, and clearly label each batch of notes with subject, source and date taken. Here are two notetaking strategies you can try; Cornell Method and Outline Method.

Cornell Method

One of the most recognisable notetaking systems is called the Cornell Method. In this system, divide a piece of paper into three sections: the summary area, the questions column and the notes column (see Figure 47). The Cornell Method provides you with a well-organised set of notes that will help you study and review your notes as you move through the course.

Topic/Objective:		Name:	
		Class/Period:	
		Date:	
Essential Question:			
Questions:		Notes:	
Summary:			

Figure 47. The Cornell Method provides a straightforward, organised, and flexible approach. Image by OpenStax used under CC-BY 4.0 licence

The right-hand notes column: Use this section to record in your own words the main points and concepts of the lecture. Skip lines between each idea in this column and use bullet points or phrases. After your notetaking session, read over your notes column and fill in any details you missed in class.

In the questions column: Write any one or two-word key ideas from the corresponding notes column.

These keywords serve as cues to help you remember the detailed information you recorded in the ‘notes’ column.

The summary area: Summarise this page of notes in two or three sentences using the summary area at the bottom of the sheet. Before you move on, read the large notes column, and quiz yourself over the key ideas you recorded in the questions column. This review process will help your memory make the connections between your notes, your textbook reading, your in-class work, and assignments.

Academic Essay Elements	
Topic	Topic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establishes context – Limits scope of essay – Introduces Issue/Problem
Thesis	Thesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Central argument or point of paper – Arrives early in paper—usually toward end of first paragraph (maybe a bit later in longer papers) – Focused, clear, and specific – Reflects writer's position on the topic/issue
Supporting Details	Supporting Detail Paragraphs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Each paragraph has a specific topic – Clarify, explain, illustrate, expand on topic – Provide EVIDENCE—quotes, data, references <p><u>Cite everything properly!</u></p>
Conclusion	Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tie back to intro/thesis – Show how details supported the argument – Why is it important? – Point to implications/outcomes, but don't introduce entirely new ideas
<p>Use the structure, but don't follow it too rigidly. The most important pieces are a strong thesis and good evidence to back it up. The conclusion should not just summarize—take it a little further.</p>	

Figure 48. This sample set of notes in the Cornell Method is designed to make sense of a large amount of information. The process of organising the notes can help you retain the information more effectively than less consistent methods. Image by OpenStax used under [CC-BY 4.0 licence](#)

The main advantage of the Cornell Method is that you are setting yourself up to have organised, workable notes. This method is a useful strategy to organise your notes for exam preparation.

Outline notes

A common format for note taking is an outline style – using numbers or letters to indicate connections

between concepts. Indicate the hierarchy of ideas by using headings, written in capitals, underlined or highlighted in some way. Within concepts, ideas can be differentiated by dot points, or some other indicator, to create an outline that makes the notes easier to read. The main benefit of an outline is its organisation.

The following formal outline example shows the basic pattern

- I. Dogs (*main topic - usually general*)
 - A. German Shepherd (*concept related to main topic*)
 - 1. Protection (*supporting information about the concept*)
 - 2. Assertive
 - 3. Loyal
 - B. Weimaraner (*concept related to main topic*)
 - 1. Family-friendly (*supporting information about the concept*)
 - 2. Active
 - 3. Healthy
- II. Cats (*main topic*)

Notetaking can continue with this sort of numbering and indenting format to show the connections between main ideas, concepts and supporting details.

Annotating notes

Annotations can refer to anything you do with a text to enhance it for your particular use (either a printed text, handwritten notes, or other sort of document you are using to learn concepts). The annotations may include highlighting passages or vocabulary, defining those unfamiliar terms once you look them up, writing questions in the margin of a book and underlining or circling key terms for future reference. You can also annotate some electronic texts.

Your mantra for highlighting text should be less is more. Always read your text selection first before you start highlighting anything. You need to know what the overall message is before you start placing emphasis in the text with highlighting. Another way to annotate notes after initial notetaking is underlining significant words or passages.

When did Lincoln die? April 15, 1865

The Gettysburg Address

President Abraham Lincoln

November 19, 1863

Where is Gettysburg? Pennsylvania
What happened there? Civil War battle of Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863 - union victory, but largest # of dead in entire war

$80(4 \times 20) + 7 = 87$

“Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

1776
from US Constitution? No - Dec of Independence

“Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

(1861-65)
for med
last
cemetery
repetition
make holy
make holy
like royalty
death
for no reason
repetition
die

IRONY

phrases from Constitution?

Figure 49. Annotations may include highlighting important topics, defining unfamiliar terms, writing questions, underlining or circling key terms, or otherwise marking a text for future reference. Whichever approach you choose, try not to overdo it; neat, organized, and efficient notes are more effective than crowded or overdone notes. Image by OpenStax used under CC-BY 4.0 licence

Taking notes for assignments

When taking notes for an assignment, be clear whether they are your own words, or a direct quote so that

you do not accidentally plagiarise. When you have finished taking notes, look for key themes or ideas and highlight them in different colours. This organises your information and helps you to see what evidence you have to support various ideas you wish to make in your assignment. Make sure to record the author, title, date, publishing details and relevant page numbers of books and articles you use. This will save you time and avoid errors when referencing.

Conclusion

Notetaking is a major element of university studying and learning. As you progress through your study, your notes need to be complete so you can recall the information you learn in lectures. The strategies that have been explored in this chapter will help you to be deliberate in your notetaking.

Key points

- Know the purpose for your notes.
- Before the class, print any lecture slides with the notes option.
- During the class, keep your notes brief, use keywords, short sentences and meaningful abbreviations.
- After the class, re-read your notes and organise them.
- The Cornell Method uses a table with a summary area, a questions column and a notes column.
- Outline notetaking uses headings, numbers or letters to show hierarchy and connections between concepts.
- Annotating your notes with highlights, underlining, circling or writing in the margin can enhance your understanding.
- Notetaking for assignments must show clearly when the words are your own or are a direct quote. Record the source details for use in referencing.

WORKING WITH INFORMATION

Brenda Carter and Rhian Morgan



Figure 50. Working effectively with information helps you succeed. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

Working effectively with information is key to successful study and research. The effective and ethical use of information, especially scholarly information, will form the basis for writing essays, assignments, reports and examinations, and constructing visual and oral presentations.

This chapter is designed to help build your skills in finding and using information. In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- Identify the key concepts and ideas you need to research
- Brainstorm similar and related terms for your key concepts
- Use search skills like truncation and phrase searching to find the most relevant resources faster
- Construct search strings to use in databases and search engines

- Limit your results to the most appropriate information sources

Six Steps to Searching

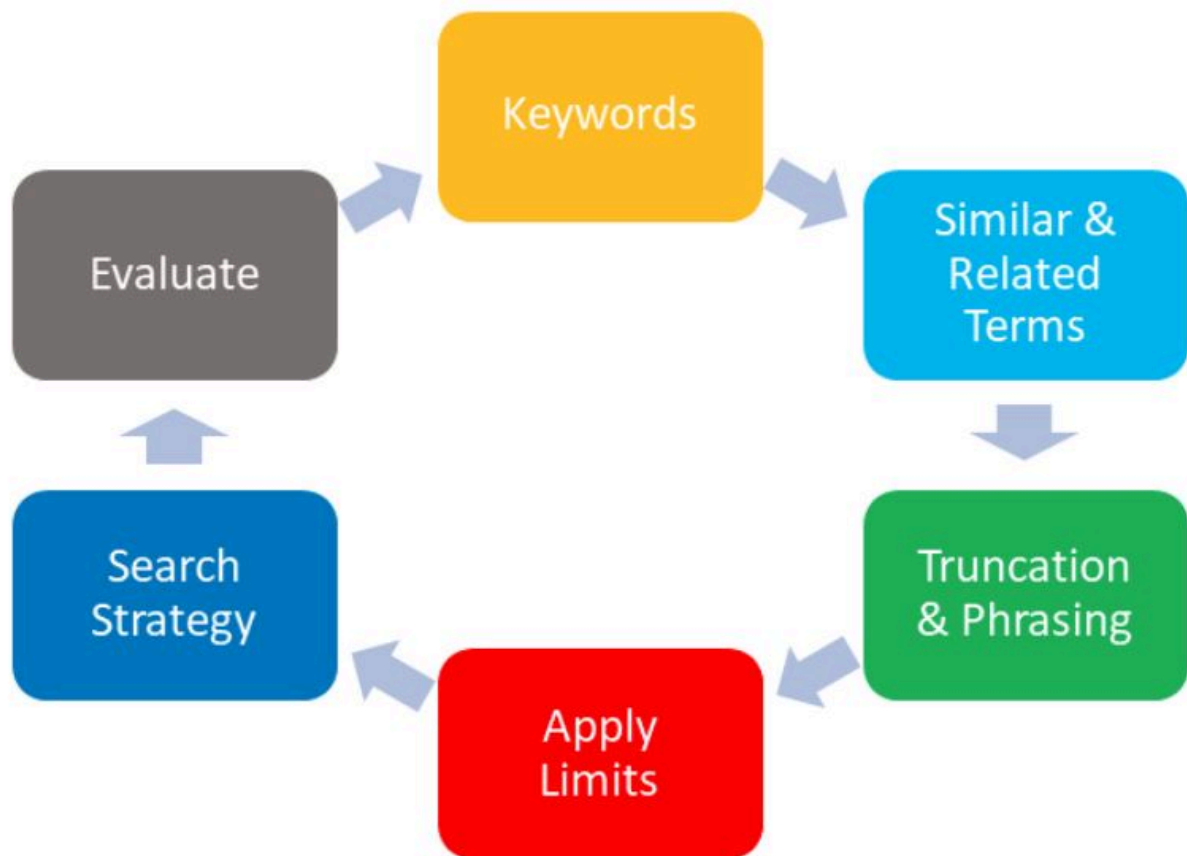


Figure 51. Six steps to searching. Image by James Cook University Library used under CC-BY 4.0 licence

Research is an ongoing process. Plan your search, try some different search strategies and evaluate the results. There is no one 'perfect search' and you may need to revisit the Six Steps to Searching many times before finding the sources most relevant to your needs. Allow plenty of time for searching, and see a librarian if you need help.

Identify the Keywords

The first step is to work out what your assignment topic is about and what you have to do. Consider the context and identify the keywords in your question. These can be:

Task words: Task words are usually verbs and they tell you what to do to complete your assignment.

Content words: Content words are the main ideas and concepts you need to research.

Limiting words: Limiting words help you focus on a particular aspect of your topic, such as a particular occupation, discipline, age, gender or time period.

Example 1

Discuss some of the **ethical** considerations for researchers conducting **research** involving **humans**. Should researchers be made to abide to **codes of conduct**? **Why/Why not**?

Task words – Discuss, Why/Why not (give reasons)

Content words – ethical, research, codes of conduct

Limiting words – humans

Example 2



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=72#h5p-1>

Brainstorm Similar and Related Terms

You can conduct a simple search using just the keywords from the assignment question, but you will get better results if you expand your list of keywords to include similar and related terms for each key concept. These could be:

- synonyms (words with a similar meaning)
- alternative spellings (eg. American)
- related terms – even antonyms (opposites) sometimes work well

Watch the video Searching Databases with Keywords to learn more.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=72#oembed-1>



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=72#h5p-2>

Phrase Searching and Truncation

Phrase Searching

When searching for two or more words together, place these words in double quotation marks. This forces the search tool to search for them in that exact order, eg. “human research”, “code of conduct”, “government control”.

Watch Phrase Searching in a Minute to learn more.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=72#oembed-2>

Truncation

Truncation will save you time. Place an asterisk after part of a word to get results for this word with different endings. For example, a search for child* will give you results for child, children, childish and childlike.

Be careful where you put the asterisk so you get the most relevant results (think about where the word changes, and how the different endings of the word are spelled).

Watch Truncation in a Minute to learn more.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=72#oembed-3>

Create a Search String

A search string combines your keywords using the Boolean operators AND and OR. Boolean operators are computer commands – write the words AND and OR in capital letters so the search engine or database doesn’t mistake them for ordinary words.

AND combines different concepts, eg. burnout AND teacher* AND “secondary school”. AND narrows a search by making sure you only get results with *all* of the search terms.

OR combines similar and related terms for the same concept. Place these related terms in parentheses (round brackets), eg. (burnout OR stress OR “mental health”). OR widens a search and gives you more results by searching for *any* of the search terms in the brackets.

A sample search string might look like this:

(“human research” OR “research on humans”) AND ethic* AND (dementia OR Alzheimers)

(government OR State) AND (control OR censor*) AND ethic*

Watch Search Strings in a Minute to learn more.



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An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=72#h5p-3>

Search in One Search

One Search is a way of searching all the library's resources – books and ebooks, journals and journal articles, multimedia and more. You can find the One Search search box on the home page of the library website.

Watch Using One Search to see how to find relevant resources for your assignment.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=72#oembed-5>

Take the search string you created using the advice in this chapter, and put it in the search bar in One Search. Then use the filters down the side of the screen to narrow your results and make them more relevant. There are a number of options in the list of Filters, but you should always think about using:

- **Peer-reviewed Journals** under **Refine** (if you have been asked to find journal articles)
- **Books** or **Book Chapters** under **Content Type** (if you need to find books – N.B. you can't use this option if you have chosen "peer-reviewed journals")
- **Date** (if you need to find works that aren't too old, you should limit your results to the last 5 years)
- **Subject** (to find subject headings that help focus your results to the most appropriate ideas)
- **Available online** under **Refine** (if you are working online and won't be able to come into the library)

Once you select the filters you want, remember to lock them in place before changing any of the words in the search bar, or you will lose them.

If you see something you like, click on the title to get more information. Read the description (abstract/summary), and if you want to read the whole article or book chapter/book, follow the links to read it online or find it in the library. You will need to log in to read the full text of articles, or to put a hold on a book.

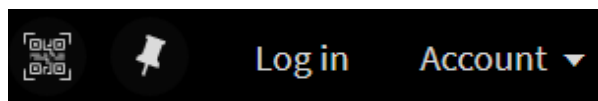


Figure 52. Image by James Cook University.

You can put the results you like in a list by clicking on the pin icon next to the title. The pin at the very top of the page will take you to your list.

Referencing Your Sources

You will need to provide a reference for every source of information you use in your assignments. This involves putting a short, in-text citation in the body of your assignment to show people that your information has come from another source (and is not your original idea), and then a full reference in the reference list (or list of works cited) at the end of your assignment, so people can find the original sources.

There are different ways to do this, so check which Referencing Style you need to use for your subject, and then find a good guide for the style (see the JCU Referencing Guides).

It's important to take good notes of the sources you have read so that you can properly attribute the right source to the information (see the chapter on Note taking).

For every source you want to use in an assignment, you will need to find:

- **Who wrote it?** (the author might be a person or an organisation, like Queensland Health)
- **When was it published?** (sometimes you just need the year, sometimes you need more details)
- **What is/are the title(s)?** (there can be more than one title – the title of the article or chapter as well as the title of the journal or book – get both)
- **What are the publication details?** (for a book you will need the publisher, for a journal article you will need the volume, issue and page numbers)
- **What is the URL or DOI?** (if it lives online, you have to give the address or the Digital Object Identifier to help other people find it)

Make sure you follow the correct style Guide to see how to lay out the information in the correct pattern. For example, here you can see the same information cited in APA 7th style and AMA 11th style – can you see how the same information is laid out in different ways? Look at the punctuation, and where the year of publication (2018) appears.

APA 7th in-text citation: Hospice patients often have a positive outlook on life (Wright et al., 2018).	AMA 11th in-text citation: Hospice patients often have a positive outlook on life. ¹
APA 7th reference list entry: Wright, S. T., Breier, J. M., Depner, R. M., Grant, P. C., & Lodi-Smith, J. (2018). Wisdom at the end of life: Hospice patients' reflections on the meaning of life and death. <i>Counselling Psychology Quarterly</i> , 31(2), 162-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2016.1274253	AMA 11th reference list entry: 1. Wright ST, Breier JM, Depner RM, Grant PC, Lodi-Smith J. Wisdom at the end of life: hospice patients' reflections on the meaning of life and death. <i>Couns Psychol Q</i> . 2018;31(2):162-185. doi:10.1080/09515070.2016.1274253

To work out how to reference a source, ask three key questions:

1. **What is it?** (Journal article? Book? A Web site?)
2. **How many authors does it have?** (each style has rules for what to do if you have more than two authors, or if you author is a company instead of a person)
3. **What style am I supposed to use?**

If it's a journal article with six authors and you have to cite it in APA style, go to the APA Guide, see how to lay out the authors, and then see how to lay out the rest of the citation for a journal article.

You can use software and programs to help you with your referencing, but always check what they have given you before you hand it in (using the Guides). Software is notoriously imperfect with referencing, and you can lose marks for not referencing correctly.

Referencing correctly can seem like a daunting task at first, but it's just a matter of putting the right piece of information into the right part of the pattern. The library provides a lot of training and support for referencing, and you will have plenty of opportunities to attend training or ask for help.

For more information about referencing your sources and avoiding plagiarism, look at the chapter on Integrity at University.

PART D: SUCCESSFUL ASSESSMENT



Successful Assessment

Image by F1 Digitalis used under CC0 licence Note: image has been modified.

MANAGING ASSESSMENT

Lyle Cleeland and Lisa Moody



Figure 53. Spending a little extra time at the start, analysing your question thoroughly and reading your criteria sheet, will make the assignment research and writing processes easier. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

It is not unusual to feel confused or overwhelmed when encountering assessment at university. This chapter is designed to guide you through the process of assessment management and provide strategies to make preparing for assessment as stress free as possible.

We start by discussing the information you receive about your assessment items and what to do with that information. It is important to know exactly what your requirements are before beginning to research or write. Spending a little extra time at the start, analysing your question thoroughly and reading your criteria sheet, will make the assignment research and writing processes easier, and will save you time in the long run.

The next section covers assessment planning. We discuss key components of assessment preparation, including finding information, writing, revising, and submitting your assessments.

We then briefly discuss academic integrity and what it means for university students before concluding the chapter and providing some key points on managing your assessments.

Understanding your Assessment Task

It can be tempting to skip over reading the assessment information and planning. However, these steps will save you time in the long run. Knowing exactly what the task requires you to do and say will ensure that your activities are focused on what is required for the task.

Task Sheets

In your subject outline, you will find assessment tasks with detailed descriptions, and rubrics – more on these later. The descriptor provides information about your assessment task. It is important to read this carefully to undertake your assessment, as it includes essential details that you must address.

Table 12. Assessment vocabulary

Topic words	These are words and concepts you have to research.
Task words	These will tell you how to approach the assignment and structure the information you find in your research (e.g., discuss, analyse).
Limiting words	These words define the scope or parameters of the assignment, e.g. Australian perspectives, a particular jurisdiction (this would be relevant then to which laws, codes or standards you consulted), or a timeframe.

Assessment vocabulary gives you clear direction on exactly what to do. Below is an example of an assessment task you may receive. Notice the use of topic words (coloured orange), limiting words (coloured blue) and task or directive words (coloured green). Consider what a topic and task analysis look like in this example question.

Discuss the suggestion that a wide range of skills are required to succeed in the professional workplace. Consider this in an Australian context.

Conducting a topic analysis is important to develop effective, targeted key words to search for assignment

resources. You can then use these words and their synonyms to start looking for good quality information which is relevant to your topic (see the [Working with Information chapter](#) for more about finding information). View the video on Boolean operators below for more information.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/?p=138#oembed-1>

For more information on conducting searches, visit the JCU Library search basics page.

Assessment style

There are a range of different assessment types you may be asked to complete (e.g. essay, report, or presentation). For more information, visit [Types of Assignments](#).

Written assessment word count

The word count, or word length, is an important piece of information as it provides a guide to the overall size of the task. The word count indicates the number of words required to adequately address the assessment task. At JCU, a general rule is you have a 10% leeway above or below the stated word count (it is recommended to check with your lecturer or tutor). For more information see the [English Language Foundations chapter](#) about writing concisely.

Word count considerations

Things to check regarding the word count include:

- What is the penalty for going over the word limit (sometimes markers will only review your writing up to the word limit, or you may lose marks for going over the limit)?
- Does the word count include in-text citations and the reference list?
- Does the word count include figures, tables, and appendices?

How many and what kind of references do you need to include in your assignments?

The number, type, and publication date of references refers to the acceptable sources of information that you reference in your work. The chapter [Working with Information](#) provides guidance about finding, evaluating, and managing sources of information.

Marking Rubric

The marking rubric provides an overview of each marked component of the assessment task and can be helpful in the planning, writing, and reviewing phase of your assessment process. The marking rubric will help you to understand more precisely what your marker will be looking for when marking your assignment. Figure 54 shows an extract from a marking rubric, where the assessment task was to write an essay outlining typical and atypical development for a chosen developmental period.

ASSESSMENT ITEM 3: CRITERIA SHEET (OR RUBRIC)

Criteria	Satisfactory	Grade	Grade	Unsatisfactory
Elements of Text (15%)	Submission contains elements of persuasive written text	S	U	Elements of persuasive text are missing or incorrectly applied
Written Communication (10%)	Expression is clear and fluent, within word limit, and uses appropriate academic language; meanings are clear. grammar, spelling and punctuation is mostly free of errors.	S	U	Expression is unclear, and/or inappropriate Frequent grammatical and other errors seriously distract the reader.
Referencing (5%)	APA referencing style applied with few errors, both in text and in the reference list. Sources generally acknowledged through paraphrasing, summarising and quoting.	S	U	Incorrect or no referencing style used. Most sources not acknowledged, or acknowledged inappropriately.

Figure 54. JCU Prep FS0120 Rubric. Image from JCU Prep Subject Outline. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

The marking rubric is also useful when you are reviewing your work prior to submission. You can use the rubric as a checklist to ensure that you have included all the key pieces of information.

Assessment Weighting

The weighting of an assessment item refers to the amount, or proportion, that each assessment mark contributes to your final grade. While you should never ignore low weighted assessment tasks, the weighting should guide the amount of time you invest in an individual assessment task.

Table 13. Relative weightings of assessment items for an example subject

Assessment item	Weighting
Annotated Bibliography	5%
Essay	25%
Short answer quiz	10%
Presentation	20%
End of semester exam	40%
	100%

Planning

Once you have understood the requirements of your assessment task, writing a plan will assist you to:

- Break the task into manageable chunks.
- Keep your assessment study time focused on what you need to be achieving.
- Keep to your word limit.

The chapter [Time Management](#) provides useful information about breaking larger tasks into smaller ones and managing your study time. Be sure to pay attention to the information about chunking your task.

Finding information



Figure 55. Spend time finding quality information for your assessment tasks. Image by [Mohamed Hassan](#) used under [CC0 licence](#)

You are usually going to need to find credible information once you understand the requirements of the

assessment task. The chapter [Working with Information](#) provides guidance on finding and managing information. Remember to keep the reference information with any notes that you are taking, so you can appropriately cite this information.

Writing your assignment

You are now ready to write your assessment. Remember to refer to your original assessment plan, including which key points you will be making.

The [English Language Foundations chapter](#) provides information about enhancing your writing and the [Types of Assignments](#) chapter provides additional information about writing specific sections and types of assignments. If you are preparing a presentation, then the [Presentations chapter](#) will be a useful guide.

Revising and reviewing

Allocate time for revising and reviewing your work before submitting. This allows you to find and fix small errors that could lose you marks. It is also an opportunity to review your document as a whole to ensure that your ideas are fully explained and linked to the assessment task. If possible, leave your writing for a couple of days before you start reviewing, editing, and proofreading. This will allow you to see your work with ‘fresh eyes’ and you will be more likely to detect errors and inconsistencies. Review each of your sentences (e.g. correct punctuation, length, and spelling), paragraphs (e.g. clear topic sentences and credible appropriately cited evidence), and the document as a whole. You can also use the information from the [English Language Foundations chapter](#) as a guide when reviewing your writing.

The marking rubric and task sheet can also be used as checklists to ensure that you have covered all the key aspects required for the assessment task. For example, check that you have:

- used the correct referencing style
- cited the required number of credible sources (if specified)
- provided information on each of the required topics
- used the required headings and formatting
- written within the required word count

The [English Language Foundations chapter](#) also provides useful information about enhancing your writing and the [Types of Assignments](#) chapter provides additional information about writing specific sections and types of assignments.

Submitting

Don't forget to submit your assessment. At JCU, this is usually done through a drop box in your LearnJCU subject site. Check that your submission has gone through if you are submitting online and keep a copy of any assessments once submitted.

Preparing for feedback



Figure 56. Spend time reviewing your feedback, this will help you improve your future assessments as well as explain your assessment mark. Image by Gerd Altmann used under [CCO licence](#)

At university, staff and your peers provide you with verbal and written feedback to help you learn and develop. However, this feedback can only be effective if you are prepared to receive it. In practice, this means you need to do the following:

- **Keep an open mind:** The person who provides you with feedback may be critical of your work or your views. This criticism is an important feature of learning at tertiary level. It is meant to be constructive, not personal. Be prepared to accept this criticism.
- **Be reflective:** To ensure that you are ready to use feedback, adopt a reflective mindset. This means reading or listening to comments and thinking about how you may use this information to improve your work.
- **Get ready to change:** Feedback is only effective if it is used. This means that you need to be prepared to act or change how you perform a task or engage in an activity in response to feedback. If you are unwilling to make changes, you limit the positive impact feedback can have.

Engaging with feedback

Once you have received feedback in class, online, in practicals, or on a piece of assessment, you need to **engage** and **act on** it. This means you need to allow yourself time to review, think about, clarify, and apply

feedback to your current and future work. As engaging with your feedback is part of the learning process, use your feedback to:

- Improve your work and/or practice
- Develop your skills
- Improve your marks

If you don't consider your feedback, then you may continue to lose marks or make the same mistakes in future assessments or tasks. Feedback is an ongoing process and includes:

- Constructive feedback on areas for improvement during your studies.
- Feedback about your work. It is not about you as a person (try not to take it personally).

Hints and tips for using feedback

There are several strategies you can utilise to take advantage of your feedback. Remember, sometimes it helps to read through your feedback, then leave it for a while before engaging with it. Consider:

- What you did well.
- What can you improve for your next assessment.
- What information or support you will need to develop those skills.
- What areas did you receive partial or no marks for? These are areas for improvement.

Dealing with negative feedback

We all make mistakes and have areas for improvement. Therefore, try not to be too hard on yourself. Put your feedback in perspective and remember, it's not personal. Importantly, use your feedback to your advantage and learn from it. Last but not least, ask for help. There are resources and people available to help you engage with your feedback and improve your skills.

Key resources at JCU include: your peers, your teaching staff, your subject outline, the peer advisors, and the learning advisors. Access The Learning Center [here](#).

Did you know?

- Markers are people too, and sometimes they make mistakes.
- Most errors are discovered in the moderation process, but occasionally a marking error slips through.
- If that has happened to you, then respectfully contact the course coordinator to raise the error. Be clear and factual.
- Don't rush to contact the marker while you are angry or upset. Make sure your contact is respectful.

- Allow appropriate time for your marks to be reviewed.
- Being close to the next grade, or usually getting better marks, are not examples of errors in marking.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the commitment to act ethically, with honesty, respect, and fairness in creating and communicating information in an academic environment. This applies to both staff and students. In short, it means to produce original work and use other people's academic work with honesty and acknowledgement. The Learning Centre has a range of resources available for you here: [Academic Integrity at JCU](#).

For more information, view the Integrity at University chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we described some of the assessment information that you will receive in your courses. We discussed the importance of planning your assessment preparation and the steps involved. We examined the importance of understanding and applying feedback to improve your assessment and finished with an overview of academic integrity. It can be tempting to skip over reading the assessment information and planning stages, however these steps will save you time overall and contribute to your academic success.

Key points

- Your task descriptors and marking rubrics provide key information about your assessment.
 - Developing a plan for the assessment task will help you to keep on track.
 - Allow time for reviewing and editing your work before submitting.
 - Reward yourself for submitting your assessment.
 - Understanding and engaging with your feedback is critical for success, and feedback is not intended to be personal.
 - Academic integrity involves engaging in behaviours and actions that are honest, respectful, and ethical.
-

References

- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. (2020). *Defining academic integrity*.
<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/defining-academic-integrity>

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Lyle Cleeland and Lisa Moody



Figure 57. Assignments are a common method of assessment at university and require careful planning and good quality research. Image by Kampus Production used under CC0 licence

Introduction

Assignments are a common method of assessment at university and require careful planning and good quality research. Developing critical thinking and writing skills are also necessary to demonstrate your ability to understand and apply information about your topic. It is not uncommon to be unsure about the processes of writing assignments at university.

This chapter has a collection of resources that will provide you with the skills and strategies to understand assignment requirements and effectively plan, research, write, and edit your assignments.

Task Analysis and Deconstructing an Assignment

It is important that you spend sufficient time understanding all the requirements before you begin researching and writing your assignments.

The **assessment task description** (located in your subject outline) provides key information about an

assessment item, including the question. It is essential to scan this document for topic, task, and limiting words. If there are any elements you do not understand, you should clarify these as early as possible.

Table 14. Parts of an assignment question

Topic words	These are words and concepts you have to research.
Task words	These will tell you how to approach the assignment and structure the information you find in your research (e.g. discuss, analyse).
Limiting words	These words define the scope or parameters of the assignment, e.g., Australian perspectives, a particular jurisdiction (this would be relevant then to which laws, codes or standards you consulted) or a timeframe.

Make sure you have a clear understanding of what the task word requires you to address.

Table 15. Task words

Task word	Definition	Example
Account for	Give reasons for or explain why something has occurred. This task directs you to consider contributing factors to a certain situation or event. You are expected to make a decision about why these occurred, not just describe the events.	Account for the factors that led to the global financial crisis.
Analyse	Consider the different elements of a concept, statement or situation. Show the different components and show how they connect or relate. Your structure and argument should be logical and methodical.	Analyse the political, social and economic impacts of climate change.
Assess	Make a judgement on a topic or idea. Consider its reliability, truth and usefulness. In your judgement, consider both the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing arguments to determine your topic's worth (similar to evaluate).	Assess the efficacy of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for the treatment of depression.
Classify	Divide your topic into categories or sub-topics logically (could possibly be part of a more complex task).	Classify the artists studied this semester according to the artistic periods they best represent. Then choose one artist and evaluate their impact on future artists.
Comment on	State your opinion on an issue or idea. You may explain the issue or idea in more detail. Be objective and support your opinion with reliable evidence.	Comment on the government's proposal to legalise safe injecting rooms.
Compare OR Compare and contrast	Show the similarities and differences between two or more ideas, theories, systems, arguments, or events. You are expected to provide a balanced response, highlighting similarities and differences.	Compare the efficiency of wind and solar power generation for a construction site.
Contrast	Point out only the differences between two or more ideas, theories, systems, arguments, or events.	Contrast virtue ethics and utilitarianism as models for ethical decision making.
Critically (this is often used with another task word, e.g. critically evaluate, critically analyse, critically discuss)	It does not mean to criticise; instead, you are required to give a balanced account, highlighting strengths and weaknesses about the topic. Your overall judgment must be supported by reliable evidence and your interpretation of that evidence.	Critically analyse the impacts of mental health on recidivism within youth justice.
Define	Provide a precise meaning of a concept. You may need to include the limits or scope of the concept within a given context.	Define digital disruption as it relates to productivity.
Describe	Provide a thorough description, emphasising the most important points. Use words to show appearance, function, process, events or systems. You are not required to make judgements.	Describe the pathophysiology of Asthma.

Task word	Definition	Example
Distinguish	Highlight the differences between two (possibly confusing) items.	Distinguish between exothermic and endothermic reactions.
Discuss	Provide an analysis of a topic. Use evidence to support your argument. Be logical and include different perspectives on the topic (This requires more than a description).	Discuss how Bronfenbrenner's ecological system's theory applies to adolescence.
Evaluate	Review both positive and negative aspects of a topic. You may need to provide an overall judgement regarding the value or usefulness of the topic. Evidence (referencing) must be included to support your writing.	Evaluate the impact of inclusive early childhood education programs on subsequent high school completion rates for First Nations students.
Explain	Describe and clarify the situation or topic. Depending on your discipline area and topic, this may include processes, pathways, cause and effect, impact, or outcomes.	Explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the film industry in Australia.
Illustrate	Clarify a point or argument with examples and evidence.	Illustrate how society's attitudes to disability have changed from a medical model to a wholistic model of disability.
Justify	Give evidence which supports an argument or idea; show why a decision or conclusions were made. Justify may be used with other topic words, such as outline, argue.	Write a report outlining the key issues and implications of a welfare cashless debit card trial and make three recommendations for future improvements. Justify your decision-making process for the recommendations.
Review	A comprehensive description of the situation or topic which provides a critical analysis of the key issues.	Provide a review of Australia's asylum policies since the Pacific Solution in 2001.
Summarise	An overview or brief description of a topic. (This is likely to be part of a larger assessment task.)	Summarise the process for calculating the correct load for a plane.

The **marking criteria** or **rubric**, is an important document to look at before you begin your assignment. This outlines how your assignment will be marked and should be used as a checklist to make sure you have included all the information required.

The assessment task description will also include the:

- Due date
- Word limit (or word count)
- Referencing style and research expectations
- Formatting requirements

For a more detailed discussion on task analysis, criteria sheets, and marking rubrics, visit the chapter [Managing Assessments](#).

Preparing your ideas

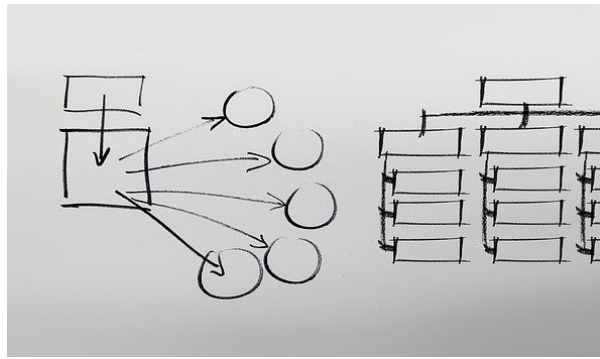


Figure 58. A concept map is a good way to prepare your ideas. Image by [Gerd Altmann](#) used under [CC0 licence](#)

Brainstorm or concept map: List possible ideas to address each part of the assignment task based on what you already know about the topic from lectures and weekly readings.

Finding appropriate information: Learn how to find scholarly information for your assignments which is:

- accurate
- recent
- reliable

See the chapter [Working With Information](#) for a more detailed explanation.

What is Academic Writing?

Academic writing tone and style

Many of the assessment items you prepare will require an academic writing style. Sometimes this feels awkward when you begin. However, it is good to know that practice at academic writing reduces this feeling.

Table 16. Comparison of academic and non-academic writing

Academic writing	Non-academic writing
Is clear, concise and well-structured.	Is verbose and may use more words than are needed.
Is formal. It writes numbers under ten in full.	Writes numbers under ten as numerals and uses symbols such as “&” instead of writing it in full.
Is reasoned and supported (logically developed).	Uses humour – puns, sarcasm.
Is authoritative (writes in third person- “Evidence suggests that...”).	Writes in first person “I think”, “I found”.
Utilises the language of the field/industry/ subject.	Uses colloquial language e.g., “mate”.

Thesis statements

One of the most important steps in writing an essay is constructing your working thesis statement. A thesis statement tells the reader the purpose, argument, or direction you will take to answer your assignment question. It is found in the introduction paragraph. The thesis statement:

- Directly *relates to the task*. Your thesis statement may even contain some of the key words or synonyms from the task description.
- Does *more than restate* the question.
- *Is specific* and uses precise language.
- Lets your reader know *your position* or the main argument that you will support with evidence throughout your assignment.
- Usually has two parts: *subject and premise*.
 - *The subject* is the key content area you will be covering.
 - *The premise* is the key argument or position.

A key element of your thesis statement should be included in the topic sentence of each paragraph.

Planning your assignment structure



Figure 59. It is sometimes easier to draft your assignment using the 2-3-1 approach. [Image by Sam Karanja](#) used under [CC0 licence](#)

When planning and drafting assignments, it is important to consider the structure of your writing. Academic writing should have a clear and logical structure and incorporate academic research to support your ideas. It can be hard to get started and at first you may feel nervous about the size of the task. This is normal. If you break your assignment into smaller pieces, it will seem more manageable as you can approach the task in sections. Refer to your brainstorm or plan. These ideas should guide your research and will also inform what you write in your draft. It is sometimes easier to draft your assignment using the 2-3-1 approach, that is, write the body paragraphs first followed by the conclusion and finally the introduction.

No one's writing is the best quality on the first few drafts, not even professional writers. It is strongly advised that you accept that your first few drafts will feel rough. Ultimately, it is the editing and review processes which lead to good quality ideas and writing.

Writing introductions and conclusions

Clear and purposeful introductions and conclusions in assignments are fundamental to effective academic writing. Your introduction should tell the reader what is going to be covered and how you intend to approach this. Your conclusion should summarise your argument or discussion and signal to the reader that you have come to a conclusion with a final statement.

Writing introductions

An effective introduction needs to inform your reader by establishing what the paper is about and provide four basic elements:

1. A brief background or overview of your assignment topic and key information that reader needs to understand your thesis statement.

2. Scope of discussion (key points discussed in body paragraphs).
3. A thesis statement (see section above).

The below example demonstrates the different elements of an introductory paragraph.

1) Information technology is having significant effects on the communication of individuals and organisations in different professions. **2)** Digital technology is now widely utilised in health settings, by health professionals. Within the public health field, doctors and nurses need to engage with ongoing professional development relating to digital technology in order to ensure efficient delivery of services to patients and communities. **3)** Clearly, information technology has significant potential to improve health care and medical education, but some health professionals are reluctant to use it.

1 Brief background/overview | 2 Scope of what will be covered | 3 The thesis statement

Writing conclusions

You should aim to end your assignments with a strong conclusion. Your conclusion should restate your thesis statement and summarise the key points you have used to prove this thesis. Finish with a key point as a final impactful statement. If your assessment task asks you to make recommendations, you may need to allocate more words to the conclusion or add a separate recommendations section before the conclusion. Use the checklist below to check your conclusion is doing the right job.

Conclusion checklist

- Have you referred to the assignment question and restated your argument (or thesis statement), as outlined in the introduction?
- Have you pulled together all the threads of your essay into a logical ending and given it a sense of unity?
- Have you presented implications or recommendations in your conclusion? (if required by your task).
- Have you added to the overall quality and impact of your essay? This is your final

statement about this topic; thus, a key take-away point can make a great impact on the reader.

- Do not add any new material or direct quotes in your conclusion.

This below example demonstrates the different elements of a concluding paragraph.

1) Clearly, communication of individuals and organisations is substantially influenced or affected by information technology across professions. **2)** Managers must ensure that effective in-house training programs are provided for public health professionals, so that they become more familiar with the particular digital technologies **3)** In addition, the patients and communities being served by public health professionals benefit when communication technologies are effectively implemented. **4)** The Australian health system may never be completely free of communication problems, however, ensuring appropriate and timely professional development, provision of resource sand infrastructure will enhance service provision and health outcomes.

1 Reference to thesis statement – In this essay the writer has taken the position that training is required for both employees and employers. | 2-3 Structure overview – Here the writer pulls together the main ideas in the essay. | 4 Final summary statement that is based on the evidence.

Note: The examples in this document are adapted from the University of Canberra and used under a [CC-BY-SA-3.0 licence](#).

Writing paragraphs

Each paragraph should have its own clearly identified Topic Sentence or main idea which relates to the argument or point (thesis) you are developing. This idea should then be explained by additional sentences which you have paraphrased from good quality sources and referenced according to the recommended guidelines of your subject (see the chapter [Working with Information](#)). Paragraphs are characterised by moving from general information to the specific details. A common structure for paragraphs in academic writing is as follows.

Topic Sentence

The first sentence of the paragraph is the Topic Sentence. This is the main idea of the paragraph and tells

the reader what you will discuss in more detail below. Each Topic Sentence should address one aspect of your overall argument.

Supporting Sentences

Supporting Sentences provide more explanation, evidence, data, analogies, and/or analysis of the main idea.

Linking/Concluding Sentence

Some paragraphs are best linked to the following paragraph through a Linking/Concluding Sentence. Not every paragraph lends itself to this type of sentence.

Use the checklist below to check your paragraphs are clear and well formed.

Paragraph checklist

- Does your paragraph have a clear main idea?
- Is everything in the paragraph related to this main idea?
- Is the main idea adequately developed and explained?
- Have you included evidence to support your ideas?
- Have you concluded the paragraph by connecting it to your overall topic (where appropriate)?

Writing sentences

Make sure all the sentences in your paragraphs make sense. Each sentence must contain a verb to be a complete sentence. Avoid incomplete sentences or ideas that are unfinished and create confusion for your reader. Also avoid overly long sentences, which happens when you join two ideas or clauses without using the appropriate punctuation. Address only one key idea per sentence. See the chapter [English Language Foundations](#) for examples and further explanation.

Use transitions (linking words and phrases) to connect your ideas between paragraphs and make your writing flow. The order that you structure the ideas in your assignment should reflect the structure you have outlined in your introduction. Refer to the transition words table in the chapter [English Language Foundations](#).

Paraphrasing and Synthesising

What is paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is changing the writing of another author into your words while retaining the original meaning. You must acknowledge the original author as the source of the information in your citation. Follow the steps in this table to help you build your skills in paraphrasing. Note: paraphrasing generally means that the rewritten section is the same or a similar length to the original.

Table 17. Paraphrasing techniques

1	Make sure you understand what you are reading. Look up keywords to understand their meanings.
2	Record the details of the source so you will be able to cite it correctly in text and in your reference list.
3	Identify words that you can change to synonyms (but do not change the key/topic words).
4	Change the type of word in a sentence (for example change a noun to a verb or vice versa).
5	Eliminate unnecessary words or phrases from the original that you don't need in your paraphrase.
6	Change the sentence structure (for example, change a long sentence to several shorter ones or combine shorter sentences to form a longer sentence).

Example of paraphrasing

Please note that these examples and in-text citations are for instructional purposes only.

Original text

Health care professionals assist people, often when they are at their most vulnerable. To provide the best care and understand their needs, workers must demonstrate good communication skills. They must develop patient trust and provide empathy to effectively work with patients who are experiencing a variety of situations including those who may be suffering from trauma or violence, physical or mental illness or substance abuse (French & Saunders, 2018).

Poor quality paraphrase example

This is a poor example of paraphrasing. Some synonyms have been used and the order of a few words changed within the sentences. However, the colours of the sentences indicate that the paragraph follows the same structure as the original text.

Health care sector workers are often responsible for **vulnerable** patients. To understand patients and deliver **good service**, they need to be **excellent communicators**. They must establish patient **rapport and show empathy** if they are to successfully care for patients from a **variety of backgrounds** and with different medical, psychological and social needs (French & Saunders, 2018).

A good quality paraphrase example

This example demonstrates a better quality paraphrase. The author has demonstrated more understanding of the overall concept in the text by using the keywords as the basis to reconstruct the paragraph.

Empathetic communication is a vital skill for health care workers. Professionals in these fields are often responsible for patients with complex medical, psychological and social needs. Empathetic communication assists in building rapport and gaining the necessary trust to assist these vulnerable patients by providing appropriate supportive care (French & Saunders, 2018).

The good quality paraphrase example demonstrates understanding of the overall concept in the text by using key words as the basis to reconstruct the paragraph. Note how the blocks of colour have been broken up to see how much the structure has changed from the original text.

What is synthesising?

Synthesising means to bring together more than one source of information to strengthen your argument. Once you have learnt how to paraphrase the ideas of one source at a time, you can consider adding additional sources to support your argument. Synthesis demonstrates your understanding and ability to

show connections between multiple pieces of evidence to support your ideas and is a more advanced academic thinking and writing skill.

Follow the steps in this table to improve your synthesis techniques.

Table 18. Synthesising techniques

1	Check your referencing guide to learn how to correctly reference more than one author at a time in your paper.
2	While taking notes for your research, try organising your notes into themes. This way you can keep similar ideas from different authors together.
3	Identify similar language and tone used by authors so that you can group similar ideas together.
4	Synthesis can not only be about grouping ideas together that are similar, but also those that are different. See how you can contrast authors in your writing to also strengthen your argument.

Example of synthesis

There is a relationship between academic procrastination and mental health outcomes. Procrastination has been found to have a negative effect on students' well-being (Balkis, & Duru, 2016). Yerdelen et al.'s (2016) research results suggest that there is a positive association between procrastination and anxiety. This is corroborated by Custer's (2018) findings which indicate that students with higher levels of procrastination also report greater levels of anxiety. Therefore, it could be argued that procrastination is an ineffective learning strategy that leads to increased levels of distress.

Topic sentence | Statements using paraphrased evidence | Critical thinking (student voice) |
Concluding statement – linking to topic sentence

This example demonstrates a simple synthesis. The author has developed a paragraph with one central theme and included explanatory sentences complete with in-text citations from multiple sources. Note how the blocks of colour have been used to illustrate the paragraph structure and synthesis (i.e. statements using paraphrased evidence from several sources). A more complex synthesis may include more than one citation per sentence.

Paraphrasing and synthesising are powerful tools that you can use to support the main idea of a paragraph.

It is likely that you will regularly use these skills at university to incorporate evidence into explanatory sentences and strengthen your essay. It is important to paraphrase and synthesise because:

- Paraphrasing is regarded more highly at university than direct quoting.
- Paraphrasing can also help you better understand the material.
- Paraphrasing and synthesising demonstrate that you have understood what you have read through your ability to summarise and combine arguments from the literature using your own words.

Creating an Argument

What does this mean?

In academic writing, if you are asked to create an argument, this means you are asked to have a position on a particular topic, and then justify your position using evidence from valid scholarly sources.

What skills do you need to create an argument?

In order to create a good and effective argument, you need to be able to:

- Read critically to find evidence.
- Plan your argument.
- Think and write critically throughout your paper to enhance your argument.

For tips on how to read and write critically, refer to the chapter [Thinking](#) for more information. A formula for developing a strong argument is presented below.

A formula for a good argument

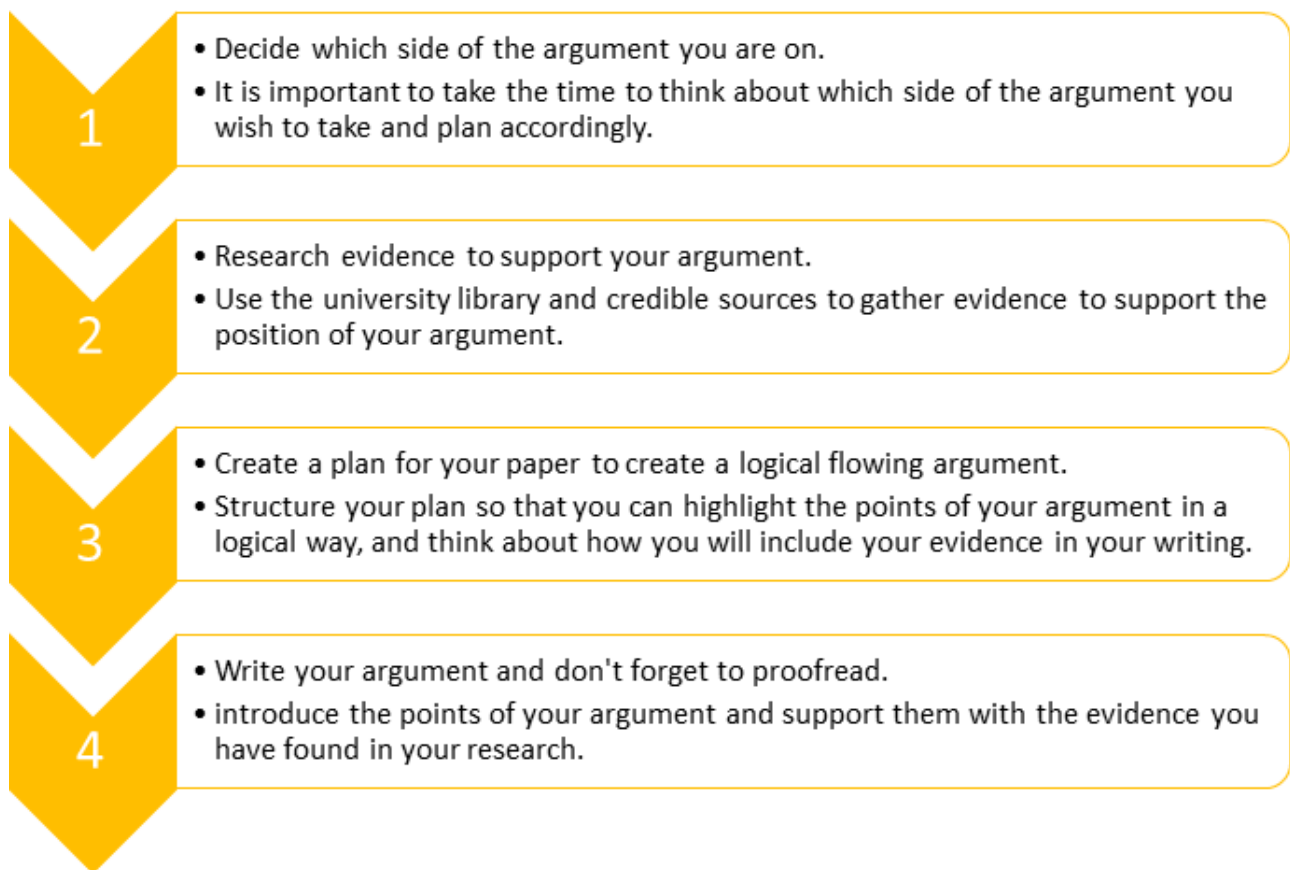


Figure 60. A formula for a good argument. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

What does an argument look like?

As can be seen from the figure above, including evidence is a key element of a good argument. While this may seem like a straightforward task, it can be difficult to think of wording to express your argument. The table below provides examples of how you can illustrate your argument in academic writing.

Table 19. Argument

Introducing your argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper will argue/claim that... • ...is an important factor/concept/idea/ to consider because... • ... will be argued/outlined in this paper.
Introducing evidence for your argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith (2014) outlines that.... • This evidence demonstrates that... • According to Smith (2014)... • For example, evidence/research provided by Smith (2014) indicates that...
Giving the reason why your point/evidence is important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therefore this indicates... • This evidence clearly demonstrates.... • This is important/significant because... • This data highlights...
Concluding a point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, it is clear that... • Therefore, ... are reasons which should be considered because... • Consequently, this leads to.... • The research presented therefore indicates...

Editing and proofreading (reviewing)

Once you have finished writing your first draft it is recommended that you spend time revising your work. Proofreading and editing are two different stages of the revision process.

- Editing considers the overall focus or bigger picture of the assignment.
- Proofreading considers the finer details.

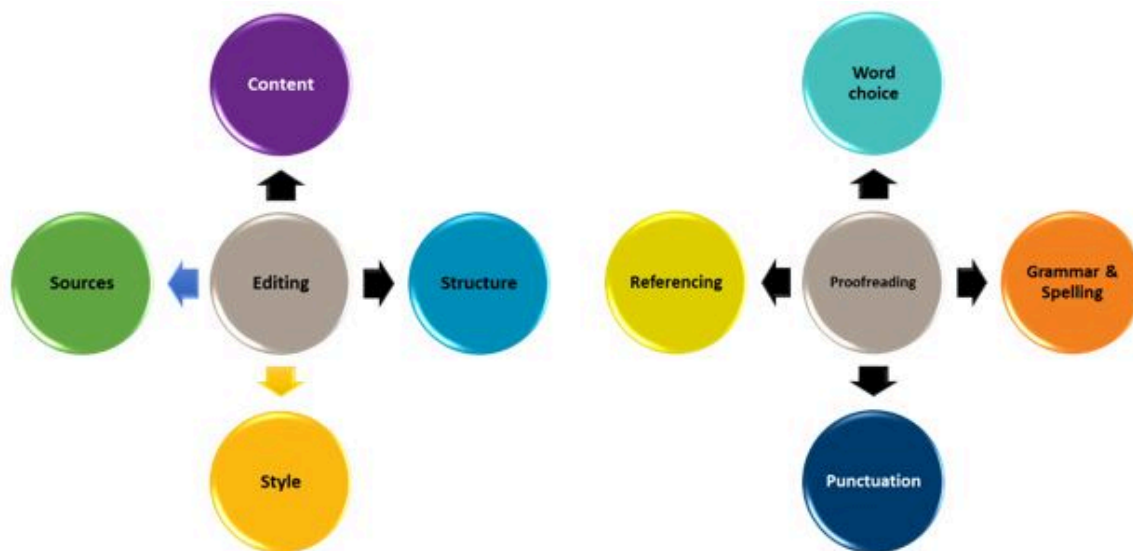


Figure 61. Editing and proofreading processes to complete at completion of writing 1st draft of assignment. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

As can be seen in the figure above, there are four main areas that you should review during the editing

phase of the revision process. The main things to consider when editing include content, structure, style, and sources. It is important to check that all the content relates to the assignment task, the structure is appropriate for the purposes of the assignment, the writing is academic in style, and that sources have been adequately acknowledged. Use the checklist below when editing your work.

Editing checklist

- Have I answered the question accurately?
- Do I have enough credible, scholarly supporting evidence?
- Is my writing tone objective and formal enough or have I used emotive and informal language?
- Have I written in third person, not first person?
- Do I have appropriate in-text citations for all my information?
- Have I included the full details for all my in-text citations in my reference list?

During proofreading, it is important to check your work for word choice, grammar and spelling, punctuation, and referencing errors. It can be easy to mis-type words like 'from' and 'form' or mix up words like 'trail' and 'trial' when writing about research, apply American rather than Australian spelling, include unnecessary commas, or incorrectly format your references list. The checklist below is a useful guide that you can use when proofreading your work.

Proofreading checklist

- Is my spelling and grammar accurate?
- Are my sentences sensible?
 - Are they complete?
 - Do they all make sense?
 - Do the different elements (subject, verb, nouns, pronouns) within my sentences agree?
 - Are my sentences too long and complicated?
 - Do they contain only one idea per sentence?

- Is my writing concise? Take out words that do not add meaning to your sentences.
- Have I used appropriate discipline specific language but avoided words I don't know or understand that could possibly be out of context?
- Have I avoided discriminatory language and colloquial expressions (slang)?
- Is my referencing formatted correctly according to my assignment guidelines? (For more information on referencing, refer to the *Managing Assessment* feedback section).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the experience of writing assignments. It began by focusing on how to read and break down an assignment question, then highlighted the key components of essays. Next, it examined some techniques for paraphrasing and summarising, and how to build an argument. It concluded with a discussion on planning and structuring your assignment and giving it that essential polish with editing and proofreading. Combining these skills and practising them can greatly improve your success with this very common form of assessment.

Key points

- Academic writing requires clear and logical structure, critical thinking and the use of credible scholarly sources.
- A thesis statement is important as it tells the reader the position or argument you have adopted in your assignment.
- Spending time analysing your task and planning your structure before you start to write your assignment is time well spent.
- Information you use in your assignment should come from credible scholarly sources such as textbooks and peer reviewed journals. This information needs to be paraphrased and referenced appropriately.
- Paraphrasing means putting something into your own words and synthesising means to bring together several ideas from sources.
- Creating an argument is a four step process and can be applied to all types of academic writing.
- Editing and proofreading are two separate processes.

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TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

Ana Stevenson



Figure 62. By recognising different types of assignments and understanding the purpose of the task, you can direct your writing skills effectively to meet task requirements. Copyright © James Cook University. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, assignments are a common method of assessment at university. You may encounter many assignments over your years of study, yet some will look quite different from others. By recognising different types of assignments and understanding the purpose of the task, you can direct your writing skills effectively to meet task requirements. This chapter draws on the skills from the previous chapter, and extends the discussion, showing you where to aim with different types of assignments.

The chapter begins by exploring the popular *essay* assignment, with its two common categories, analytical and argumentative essays. It then examines assignments requiring *case study responses*, as often encountered in fields such as health or business. This is followed by a discussion of assignments seeking a *report* (such as a scientific report) and *reflective writing* assignments, which are common in nursing,

education, and human services. The chapter concludes with an examination of annotated bibliographies and literature reviews. The chapter also has a selection of templates and examples throughout to enhance your understanding and improve the efficacy of your assignment writing skills.

Different Types of Written Assignments

Essay

At university, an essay is a common form of assessment. In the previous chapter [Writing Assignments](#), we discussed what was meant by showing academic writing in your assignments. It is important that you consider these aspects of structure, tone, and language when writing an essay.

Components of an essay

Essays should use formal but reader-friendly language and have a clear and logical structure. They must include research from credible academic sources such as peer reviewed journal articles and textbooks. This research should be referenced throughout your essay to support your ideas (see the chapter [Working with Information](#)).

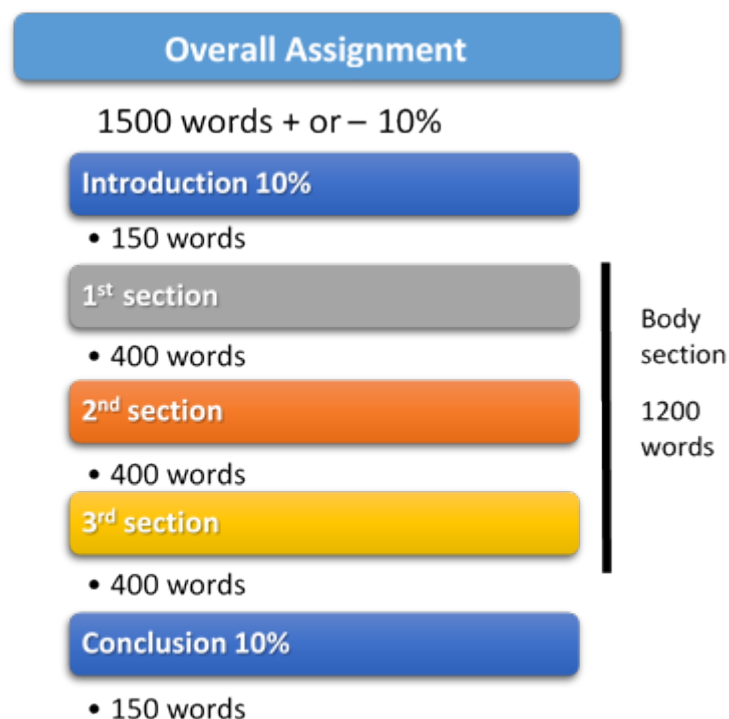


Figure 63. Demonstrating how to plan and allocate words for an assignment task. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

If you have never written an essay before, you may feel unsure about how to start. Breaking your essay into sections and allocating words accordingly will make this process more manageable and will make planning the overall essay structure much easier.

- An essay requires an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- Generally, an introduction and conclusion are each approximately 10% of the total word count.
- The remaining words can then be divided into sections and a paragraph allowed for each area of content you need to cover.
- Use your task and criteria sheet to decide what content needs to be in your plan

An effective essay introduction needs to inform your reader by doing four basic things:

Table 20. An effective essay

1	Engage the reader's interest and provide a brief background of the topic.
2	Provide a thesis statement. This is the position or argument you will adopt. (Note that a thesis statement is not always required. Check with your tutor).
3	Outline the structure of the essay.
4	Indicate any parameters or scope that will/will not be covered.

An effective essay body paragraph needs to:

1	State the topic sentence or main point of the paragraph. If you have a thesis statement, the topic sentence should relate to this.
2	Expand this main idea, define any terminology, and explain concepts in more depth.
3	This information should be paraphrased and referenced from credible sources according to the appropriate referencing style of your course.
4	Demonstrate critical thinking by showing the relationship of the point you are making and the evidence you have included. This is where you introduce your "student voice". Ask yourself the "So what?" question (as outlined in the critical thinking section) to add a discussion or interpretation of how the evidence you have included in your paragraph is relevant to your topic.
5	Conclude your idea and link to your next point.

An effective essay conclusion needs to:

1	Summarise or state the main points covered, using past tense.
2	Provide an overall conclusion that relates to the thesis statement or position you raised in your introduction.
3	Not add any new information.

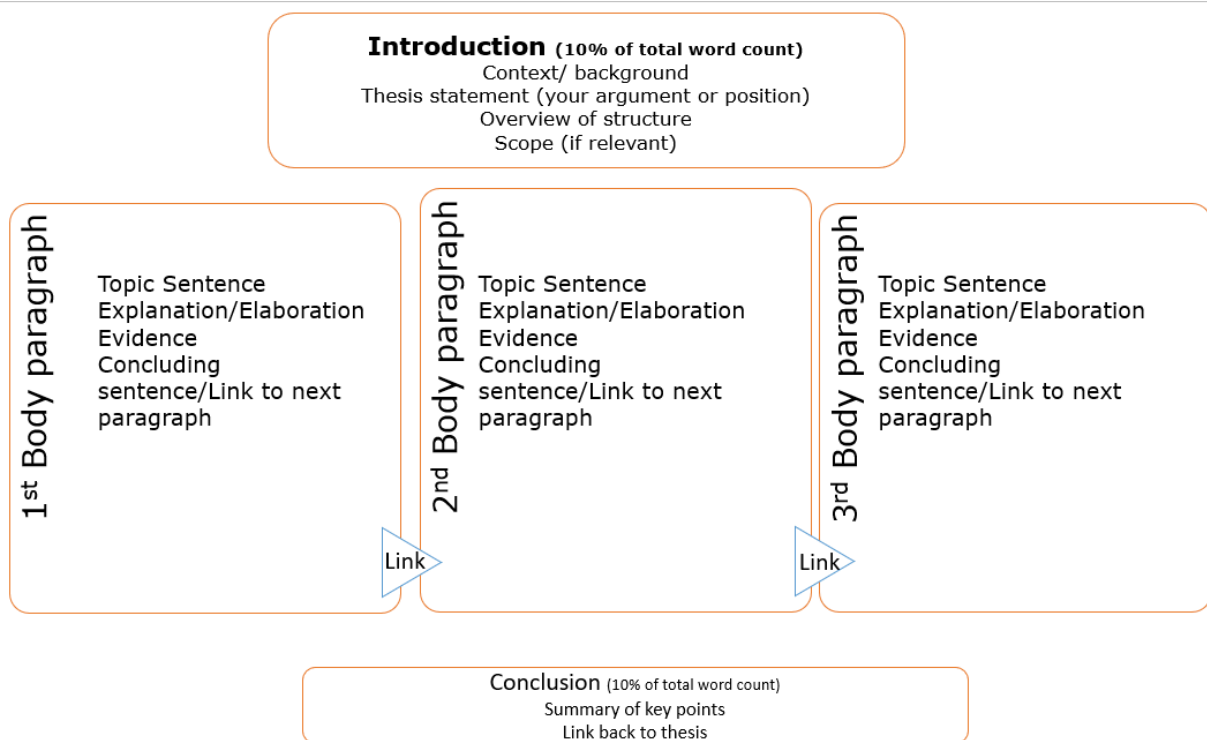


Figure 64. Essay structure overview template figure. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

Common types of essays

You may be required to write different types of essays, depending on your study area and topic. Two of the most commonly used essays are **analytical** and **argumentative**. The task analysis process discussed in the previous chapter [Writing Assignments](#) will help you determine the type of essay required. For example, if your assignment question uses task words such as analyse, examine, discuss, determine, or explore, then you would be writing an **analytical essay**. If your assignment question has task words such as argue, evaluate, justify, or assess, then you would be writing an **argumentative essay**. Regardless of the type of essay, your ability to analyse and think critically is important and common across genres.

Analytical essays

These essays usually provide some background description of the relevant theory, situation, problem, case, image, etcetera that is your topic. Being analytical requires you to look carefully at various components or sections of your topic in a methodical and logical way to create understanding.

The purpose of the analytical essay is to demonstrate your ability to examine the topic thoroughly. This requires you to go deeper than description by considering different sides of the situation, comparing and contrasting a variety of theories and the positives and negatives of the topic. Although your position on the topic may be clear in an analytical essay, it is not necessarily a requirement that you explicitly identify this with a thesis statement. In an argumentative essay, however, it is necessary that you explicitly identify

your position on the topic with a thesis statement. If you are unsure whether you are required to take a position, and provide a thesis statement, it is best to check with your tutor.

Argumentative essays

These essays require you to take a position on the assignment topic. This is expressed through your thesis statement in your introduction. You must then present and develop your arguments throughout the body of your assignment using logically structured paragraphs. Each of these paragraphs needs a topic sentence that relates to the thesis statement. In an argumentative essay, you must reach a conclusion based on the evidence you have presented.

Case study responses

Case studies are a common form of assignment in many study areas and students can under perform in this genre for a number of key reasons.

Students typically lose marks for not:

- Relating their answer sufficiently to the case details.
- Applying critical thinking.
- Writing with clear structure.
- Using appropriate or sufficient sources.
- Using accurate referencing.

When structuring your response to a case study, remember to refer to the case. Structure your paragraphs similarly to an essay paragraph structure, but include examples and data from the case as additional evidence to support your points (see Figure 65). The colours in the sample paragraph below show the function of each component.

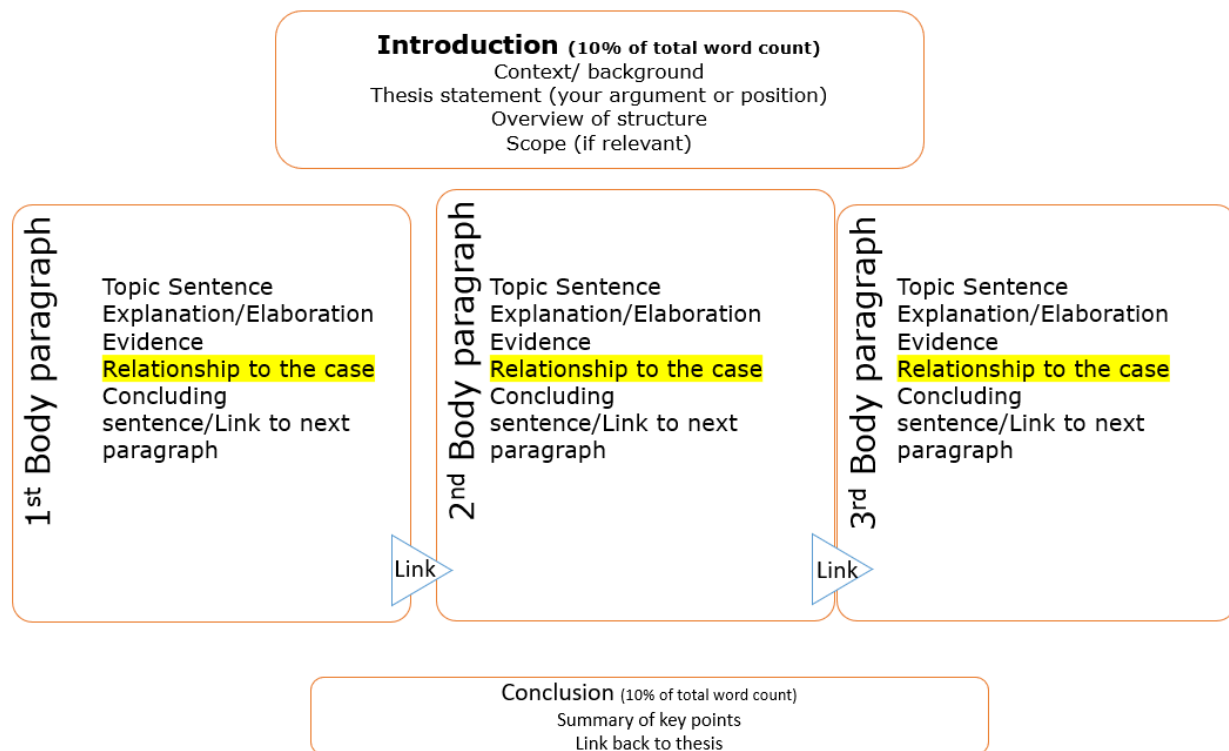


Figure 65. Case study response structure template. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) Code of Conduct and Nursing Standards (2018) play a crucial role in determining the scope of practice for nurses and midwives. A key component discussed in the code is the provision of person-centred care and the formation of therapeutic relationships between nurses and patients (NMBA, 2018). This ensures patient safety and promotes health and wellbeing (NMBA, 2018). The standards also discuss the importance of partnership and shared decision-making in the delivery of care (NMBA, 2018, 4). Boyd and Dare (2014) argue that good communication skills are vital for building therapeutic relationships and trust between patients and care givers. This will help ensure the patient is treated with dignity and respect and improve their overall hospital experience. In the case, the therapeutic relationship with the client has been compromised in several ways. Firstly, the nurse did not conform adequately to the guidelines for seeking informed consent before performing the examination as outlined in principle 2.3 (NMBA, 2018). Although she explained the procedure, she failed to give the patient appropriate choices regarding her health care.

Topic sentence | Explanations using paraphrased evidence including in-text references | Critical thinking (asks the so what? question to demonstrate your student voice). | Relating the theory back to the specifics of the case. The case becomes a source of examples as extra evidence to support the points you are making.

Report

Reports are a common form of assessment at university and are also used widely in many professions. It is a common form of writing in business, government, scientific, and technical occupations.

Reports can take many different structures. A report is normally written to present information in a structured manner, which may include explaining laboratory experiments, technical information, or a business case. Reports may be written for different audiences, including clients, your manager, technical staff, or senior leadership within an organisation. The structure of reports can vary, and it is important to consider what format is required. The choice of structure will depend upon professional requirements and the ultimate aims of the report. Consider some of the options in the table below (see Table 21).

Table 21. Explanations of different types of reports

Executive or Business Reports	Overall purpose is to convey structured information for business decision making.
Short form or Summary Reports	Are abbreviated report structures designed to convey information in a focused short form manner.
Scientific Reports	Are used for scientific documentation purposes and may detail the results of research or describe an experiment or a research problem.
Technical Reports	Are used to communicate technical information for decision making, this may include discussing technical problems and solutions.
Evaluation Reports	Present the results of or a proposal for an evaluation or assessment of a policy, program, process or service.

Reflective writing



Figure 66. Reflective writing is used to help you explore feelings, experiences, opinions, events or new information to gain a clearer and deeper understanding of your learning. Image by Manfred Richter used under CC0 licence

Reflective writing is a popular method of assessment at university. It is used to help you explore feelings, experiences, opinions, events, or new information to gain a clearer and deeper understanding of your learning.

A reflective writing task requires more than a description or summary. It requires you to analyse a situation, problem or experience, consider what you may have learnt, and evaluate how this may impact your thinking and actions in the future. This requires critical thinking, analysis, and usually the application of good quality research, to demonstrate your understanding or learning from a situation.

Essentially, reflective practice is the process of looking back on past experiences and engaging with them in a thoughtful way and drawing conclusions to inform future experiences. The reflection skills you develop at university will be vital in the workplace to assist you to use feedback for growth and continuous improvement. There are numerous models of reflective writing and you should refer to your subject guidelines for your expected format. If there is no specific framework, a simple model to help frame your thinking is **What? So what? Now what?** (Rolfe et al., 2001).

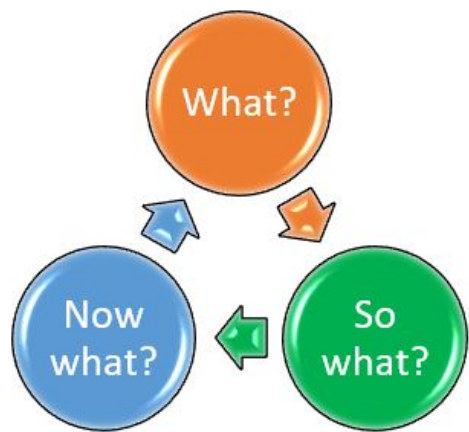


Figure 67. What? So What? Now What? Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

Table 22. What? So What? Now What? Explained

What?	Describe the experience – who, what, why, when, where?
So what?	What have you learnt from this? Why does it matter? What has been the impact on you? In what way? Why? You can include connections to coursework, current events, past experiences.
Now what?	What are you going to do as a result of your experience? How will you apply what you have learnt in the future? Are there critical questions to further pursue? Make an action plan of what you will do next.



Figure 68. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle. Image by Jason S. Todd used under CC-BY-NC-SA licence

The Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

The Gibbs' Cycle of reflection encourages you to consider your feelings as part of the reflective process. There are six specific steps to work through. Following this model carefully and being clear of the requirements of each stage, will help you focus your thinking and reflect more deeply. This model is popular in Health.

The 4 R's of reflective thinking

This [model](#) (Ryan and Ryan, 2013) was designed specifically for university students engaged in experiential learning. Experiential learning includes any 'real-world' activities, including practice led activities, placements, and internships. Experiential learning, and the use of reflective practice to heighten this learning, is common in Creative Arts, Health, and Education.

Annotated bibliography

What is it?

An annotated bibliography is an alphabetical list of appropriate sources (e.g. books, journal articles, or websites) on a topic, accompanied by a brief summary, evaluation, and sometimes an explanation or reflection on their usefulness or relevance to your topic. Its purpose is to teach you to research carefully, evaluate sources and systematically organise your notes. An annotated bibliography may be one part of

a larger assessment item or a stand-alone assessment item. Check your task guidelines for the number of sources you are required to annotate and the word limit for each entry.

How do I know what to include?

When choosing sources for your annotated bibliography, it is important to determine:

- The topic you are investigating and if there is a specific question to answer.
- The type of sources on which you need to focus.
- Whether these sources are reputable and of high quality.

What do I say?

Important considerations include:

- Is the work current?
- Is the work relevant to your topic?
- Is the author credible/reliable?
- Is there any author bias?
- The strength and limitations (this may include an evaluation of research methodology).

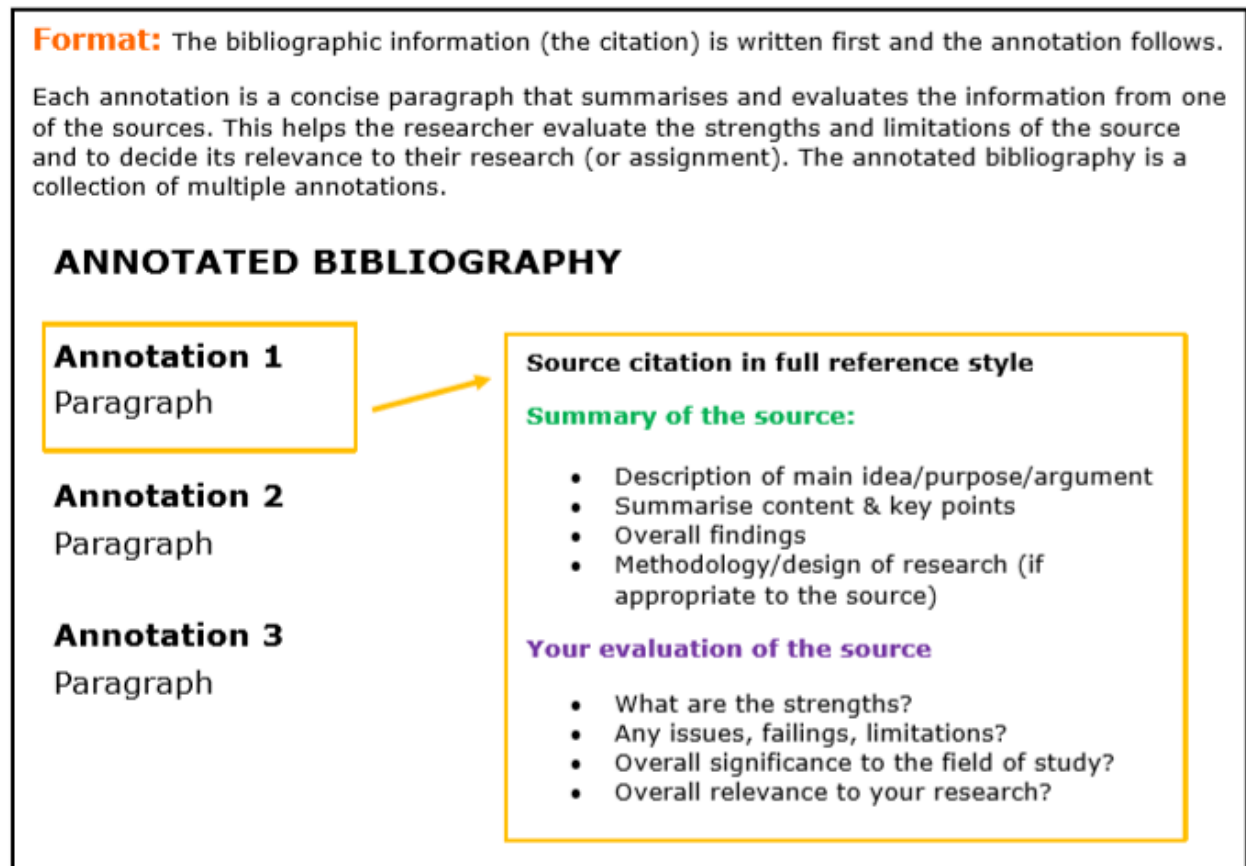


Figure 69. Annotated Bibliography. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

Literature reviews

Generally, a literature review requires that you review the scholarly literature and establish the main ideas that have been written about your chosen topic. A literature review does not summarise and evaluate each resource you find (this is what you would do in an annotated bibliography). You are expected to analyse and synthesise or organise common ideas from multiple texts into key themes which are relevant to your topic (see Figure 71). You may also be expected to identify gaps in the research.

It is easy to get confused by the terminology used for literature reviews. Some tasks may be described as a systematic literature review when actually the requirement is simpler; to review the literature on the topic but do it in a systematic way. There is a distinct difference (see Table 23). As a commencing undergraduate student, it is unlikely you would be expected to complete a systematic literature review as this is a complex and more advanced research task. It is important to check with your lecturer or tutor if you are unsure of the requirements.

Table 23. Comparison of Literature Reviews

A literature review	A systematic literature review
<p>A review that analyses and synthesises the literature on your research topic in a systemic (clear and logical) way. It may be organised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conceptually• Chronologically• Methodologically	<p>A much larger and more complicated research project which follows a clearly defined research protocol or process to remove any reviewer bias. Each step in the search process is documented to ensure it is able to be replicated, repeated or updated.</p>

When conducting a literature review, use a table or a spreadsheet, if you know how, to organise the information you find. Record the full reference details of the sources as this will save you time later when compiling your reference list (see Figure 70).

<i>Full reference details</i>	<i>Theme 1</i>	<i>Theme 2</i>	<i>Theme 3</i>	<i>Theme 4</i>
<i>Source 1</i>				
<i>Source 2</i>				
<i>Source 3</i>				
<i>Source 4</i>				
<i>Source 5</i>				
<i>Source 6</i>				

Figure 70. Themes in a table. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

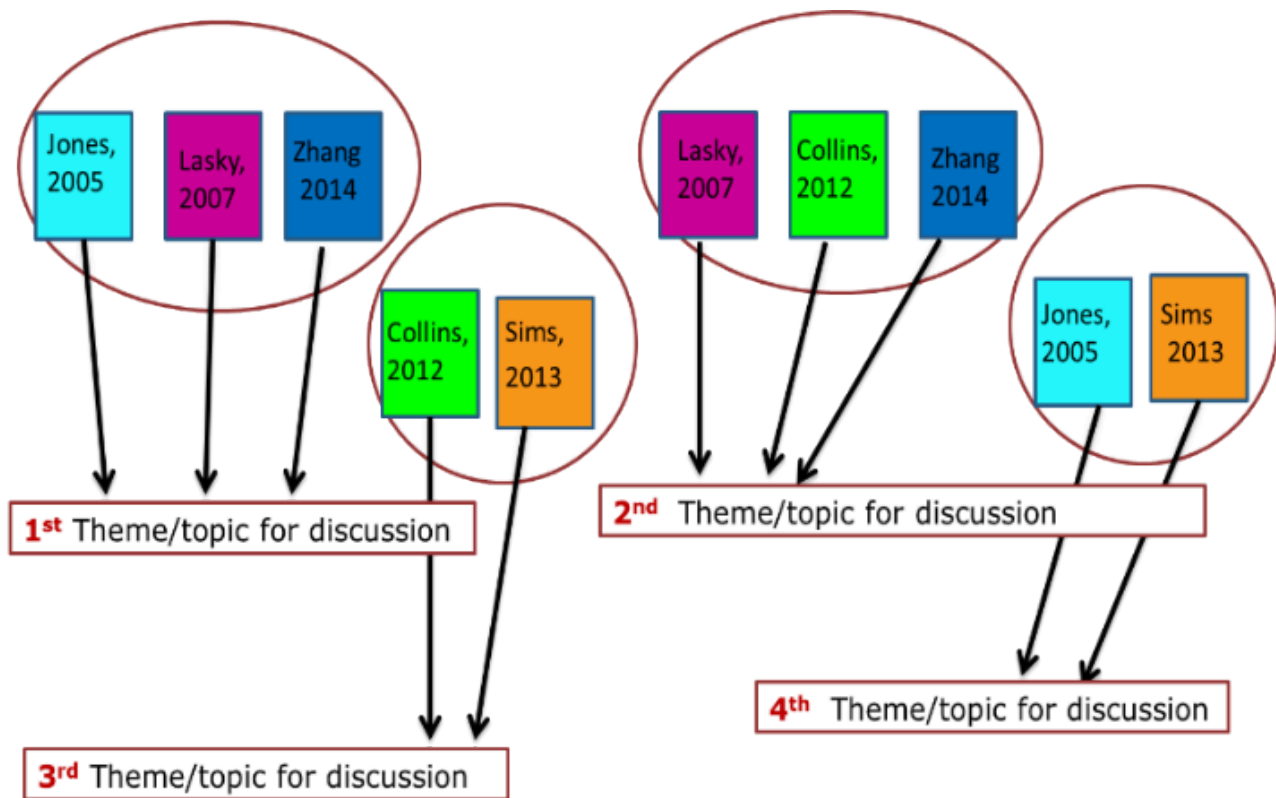


Figure 71. Thematic organisation. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has provided an introduction to the types of assignments you can expect to complete at university, as well as outlined some tips and strategies with examples and templates for completing them. First, the chapter investigated *essay* assignments, including analytical and argumentative essays. It then examined *case study* assignments, followed by a discussion of the *report* format. *Reflective writing*, popular in nursing, education, and human services, was also considered. Finally, the chapter briefly addressed annotated bibliographies and literature reviews. The chapter also has a selection of templates and examples throughout to enhance your understanding and improve the efficacy of your assignment writing skills.

Key points

- Not all assignments at university are the same. Understanding the requirements of different types of assignments will assist in meeting the criteria more effectively.
- There are many different types of assignments. Most will require an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

- An essay should have a clear and logical structure and use formal but reader-friendly language.
- Breaking your assignment into manageable chunks makes it easier to approach.
- Effective body paragraphs contain a topic sentence.
- A case study structure is similar to an essay, but you must remember to provide examples from the case or scenario to demonstrate your points.
- The type of report you may be required to write will depend on its purpose and audience. A report requires structured writing and uses headings.
- Reflective writing is popular in many disciplines and is used to explore feelings, experiences, opinions, or events to discover what learning or understanding has occurred. Reflective writing requires more than description. You need to be analytical, consider what has been learnt, and evaluate the impact of this on future actions.
- Annotated bibliographies teach you to research and evaluate sources and systematically organise your notes. They may be part of a larger assignment.
- Literature reviews require you to look across the literature and analyse and synthesise the information you find into themes.

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PRESENTATIONS

Rhian Morgan



Figure 72. You will likely at some point during your program be required to deliver information via a presentation. Image by fauxels used under CC0 licence

Introduction

Presentations are a common form of assessment at university. At some point during your program, you will very likely be required to deliver information via a presentation. This chapter provides you with the foundational knowledge, skills, and tips to prepare and present your work effectively.

Types of Presentations

There are various types of presentations you may come across at university. Being aware of each type of presentation can be beneficial for you as a student. At university, most presentations will either be formal, informal, or group presentations.

- **Formal presentations** are instances where you are required to prepare in advance to deliver a talk. This can be for an assessment piece, interview, conference, or project. In a formal presentation, you are likely to use some form of visual tool to deliver the information.
- **Informal presentations** are occasions where you may be required to deliver an impromptu talk. This may occur in tutorials, meetings, or gatherings.
- **Group presentations** are normally formal and require you to work collaboratively with your peers

in delivering information. Similar to formal presentations, group presentations require prior planning and practice. Group presentations are normally done for an assessment piece, projects, or conferences. Some visual tools may be used.

Regardless of the type of presentation you are asked to do, understanding the standard forms of presentations will assist with your preparation.

Preparation

Like other assessments or tasks, preparation is key to successfully delivering a presentation as it will help to ensure that you are heading in the right direction from the start. It will also likely increase your confidence in completing the presentation. Irrespective of the type of presentation, you can use the steps shown in Figure 73 for your preparation.



Figure 73. Steps for preparing your presentation. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

The steps shown in Figure 73 will essentially allow you to create tailored presentations which have directed content addressing a specific topic or task. This will allow you to engage your audience and deliver the message that you are trying to communicate effectively. Specific tips and tricks on how to present effectively are discussed later in this chapter.

Presentation Structure

Similar to written assignments, creating a structure is crucial to delivering your presentation. The benefits of having a structure are that your presentation will flow in a logical manner and your audience will be able to follow and understand the information you are delivering. Presentation structures may vary depending on whether you are presenting in a group, presenting informally, or presenting a poster. Nonetheless, using some form of structure will likely be beneficial to both you and your audience. When structuring a presentation, also consider the platform, technology and setting. For example, if you are presenting informally, you may not require the use of any form of technology or visual equipment. You may just rely on hand written notes. In contrast, if you are presenting in a more formal setting, you may prefer to use technology to assist you, such as PowerPoint. Figure 77 offers a sample you can use to create your structure. Be sure to check any task sheet given to you by your lecturer. They may have a particular structure they wish for you to use for a specific task.



Figure 74. A sample structure of a presentation. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

Tips and Tricks

There are certain strategies you can use to help deliver a good presentation. Not every strategy is going to be applicable to all presentations and every individual. You will need to choose the strategies that work for you and meet the objectives of your presentation, relate to your audience, and importantly address the overall task. Delivering your work is one of the hardest aspects of a presentation, but it is achievable. Therefore, it is essential that you have the appropriate approach in your delivery. This includes prior planning, practice, and being confident.

The tips and tricks in this section will guide you in preparing and delivering effective presentations. Please note that some of these tips and tricks may be more relevant to oral than visual presentations.

Tip 1: Improve your delivery

Figure 75 presents five simple ways to lift the standard of your delivery.

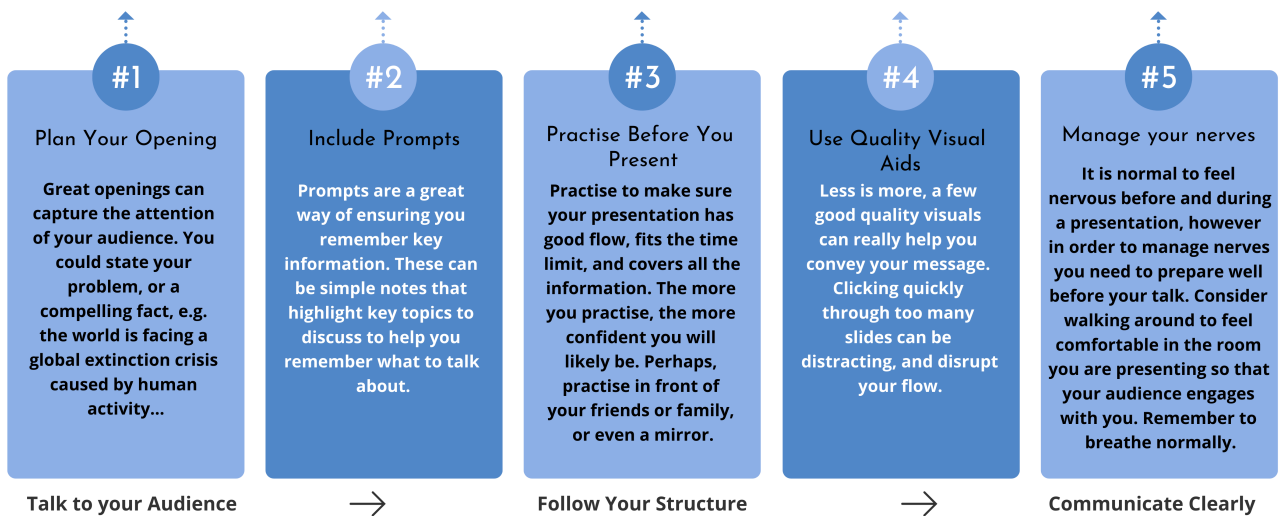


Figure 75. Improving your delivery. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

Tip 2: Stay on track with your presentation

Figure 76 presents reminders about your audience, structure, and focus of your presentation to keep you on track.

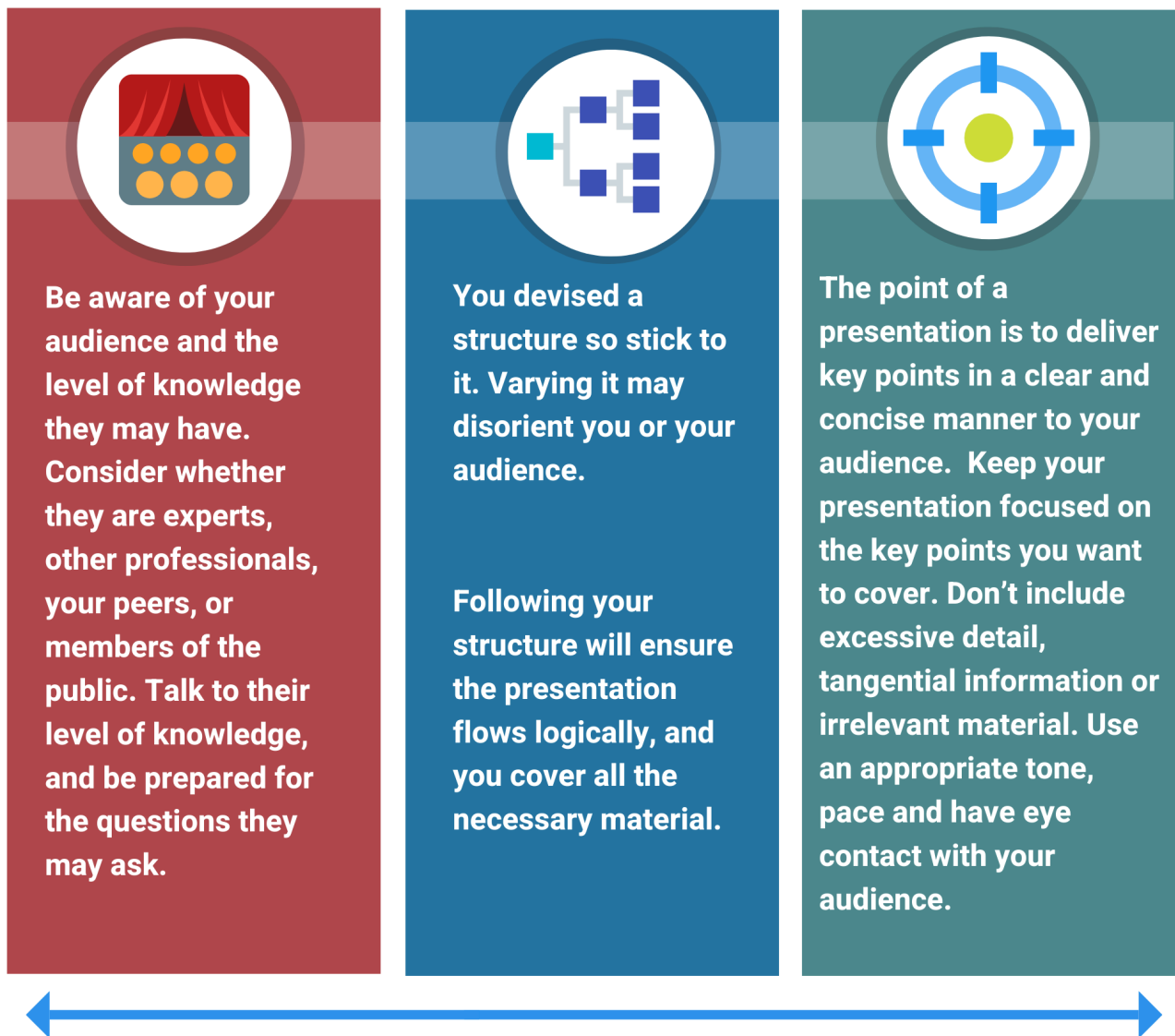


Figure 76. Stay on track with your presentation. Image by USQ used under CC BY-SA 4.0 licence

Tip 3: Consider your voice and body

When giving an oral presentation, you should pay special attention to your voice and body. Voice is more than the sum of the noises you make as you speak. Pay attention to inflection, which is the change in pitch or loudness of your voice. You can deliberately use inflection to make a point, to get people's attention, or to make it very obvious that what you are saying right now is important. You can also change the volume of your voice. Speak too softly, and people will think you are shy or unwilling to share your ideas; speak too loudly, and people will think you are shouting at them. Control your volume to fit the audience and the size of the venue. If you use these tips, you should do a good job of conveying your ideas to an audience.



Figure 77. Take care to control the speed at which you give a presentation so that everyone can listen comfortably. Image by 祝鹤槐 used under CC0 licence

Some people have a tendency to rush through their presentations because they are feeling nervous. This means they speed up their speech, and the audience has a difficult time following along. Take care to control the speed at which you give a presentation so that everyone can listen comfortably. You can achieve this by timing yourself when preparing and practising your talk. If you are exceeding the time limit, you may either be speaking too quickly, or have too much content to cover.

Also, to add to the comfort of the listeners, it is always nice to use a conversational tone in a presentation. This includes such components as stance, gesture, and eye contact—in other words, overall body language. How do you stand when you are giving a presentation? Do you move around and fidget? Do you look down at the ground or stare at your note cards? Are you chewing gum or sticking your hands in and out of your pockets nervously? Obviously, you don't want to do any of these things. Make eye contact with your audience as often as possible. Stand in a comfortable manner, but don't fidget. Use gestures sparingly to make certain points. Most importantly, try to be as comfortable as you can knowing that you have practised the presentation beforehand and you know your topic well. This will help to calm nerves.

Tip 4: Consider your attitude

Attitude is everything. Your enthusiasm for your presentation will prime the audience. If you are bored by your own words, the audience will be yawning. If you are enthused by what you have to offer, they will sit up in their seats and listen intently. Also, be interested in your audience. Let them know that you are excited to share your ideas with them because they are worth your effort.

Tip 5: Consider the visuals

You might also think about using technology to deliver your presentation. Perhaps you will deliver a slide presentation in addition to orally communicating your ideas to your audience. Keep in mind that the best presentations are those with minimal words or pictures on the screen, just enough to illustrate the

information conveyed in your oral presentation. Do a search on lecture slides or presentation slides to find a myriad suggestions on how to create them effectively. You may also create videos to communicate what you found in your research.

Today, there are many different ways to take the information you found and create something memorable through which to share your knowledge. When you are making a presentation that includes a visual component, pay attention to three elements: design, method, and function. The design includes such elements as size, shape, colour, scale, and contrast. You have a vast array of options for designing a background or structuring the visual part of your presentation, whether online or offline.

Consider which method to use when visually presenting your ideas. Will it be better to show your ideas by drawing a picture, including a photograph, using clip art, or showing a video? Or will it be more powerful to depict your ideas through a range of colours or shapes? These decisions will alter the impact of your presentation. Will you present your ideas literally, as with a photograph, or in the abstract, as in some artistic rendition of an idea? For example, if you decide to introduce your ideas symbolically, a picture of a pond surrounded by tall trees may be the best way to present the concept of a calm person. Consider also the purpose of the visuals used in your presentation. Are you telling a story? Communicating a message? Creating movement for the audience to follow? Summarising an idea? Motivating people to agree with an idea? Supporting and confirming what you are telling your audience? Knowing the purpose of including the visual element of your presentation will make your decisions about design and method more meaningful and successful.

As mentioned previously, not every strategy is applicable to all presentations or to every individual. Choose the strategies that are relevant to you and focus on them.

Conclusion

Delivering a presentation may be daunting, especially if you are new to university. But as we have discussed in this chapter, there are several approaches you can use to help you prepare and deliver your presentation effectively. While each individual may have their own approach, preparing, planning, structuring and practising your presentation will go a long way to help you achieve success. Following the steps and considering the ideas in this chapter places you in a good position to deliver presentations effectively. The approaches are beneficial, but ensure you are adhering to any specific requirements included in the assignment task sheet. Following the task sheet closely and applying these presentation skills will increase your likelihood of academic success.

Key points

- Understand the type of presentation you are asked to deliver.
- Start preparing in advance and adopt a structure.
- Know your topic well and your audience.
- Try and practice different strategies, tools, and speaking approaches well before your presentation and ensure it is within the allocated time limit. Remember, practice, practice and practice!
- Be confident in yourself, your presentation skills, and follow the plan you have developed.

VERSION HISTORY

This page provides a record of changes made to this guide after publication. Each set of edits is acknowledged with a 0.1 increase in the version number. The downloadable export files available for this guide reflect the most recent version.

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1.0	June 2023	This guide is published via JCU Open eBooks
1.1		
1.2		